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ABSTRACT

Provisions for children with specific learning difficulties were studied in 27 secondary schools in 5 regions of Scotland. Specific learning difficulties were seen as functional weaknesses in students who might otherwise be intellectually able. Questionnaires were completed by the schools to determine: number of students with specific learning difficulties in the school, the school's conceptualizations and provisions for students with specific learning difficulties, and the relationship of this provision to the school's well-established "whole-school approach" to special needs. Six of the schools were studied more intensively through interviews with key personnel. Additionally, comparisons were made between Scottish school and English school approaches. The following types of provisions are considered: identification strategies, cooperative teaching, direct remedial intervention using structured teaching approaches, differentiation of classroom teaching materials, information technology and audiovisual resources, fostering independent learning, counseling, reduction of curriculum demands, and alternative assessment measures. Survey questionnaires are appended, along with research methodology notes and study data. (Contains 26 references.) (SW)

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PROVISION FOR PUPILS WITH SPECIFIC LEARNING DIFFICULTIES IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

A Report to SOED

by

Alan Dyson and David Skidmore

Special Needs Research Group
Department of Education
University of Newcastle upon Tyne

September 1994

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Provision For Pupils With Specific Learning Difficulties In Secondary Schools: A Report to SOED

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. This report presents the findings of a research project undertaken by the Special Needs Research Group in the Department of Education, University of Newcastle upon Tyne. The project was sponsored by the Scottish Office Education Department (SOED) and took place over the course of the academic year 1993-1994.

The research investigated, through survey and case study, provision for children with specific learning difficulties in 27 secondary schools in five Regions, together with some comparative work in English schools. It was particularly concerned with the ways in which schools were reconciling such provision with their established approaches to Learning Support. (Chapter 1)

2. Specific learning difficulties were seen by responding schools in terms of particular functional weaknesses in pupils who might otherwise be intellectually able. The psycho-medical aetiology, diagnosis and remediation of those weaknesses is less important for schools than their impact on the pupil's ability to function and learn within a common curriculum. Provision, therefore, draws on familiar Learning Support strategies aimed at enabling the pupil to participate as fully as possible in the curriculum. It focuses on assembling such strategies into 'packages' targeted at individual pupils, and can thus be characterised as *eclectic, pragmatic, responsive and customised.* (Chapter 2)

3. Although all schools responding to the project were adopting a broadly similar approach to specific learning difficulties provision, there were differences in emphasis between schools. These depended partly on the caseload of pupils with specific learning difficulties in relation to the size of the school and its overall special needs population. There was some tendency for 'low demand' schools to have less formalised approaches, and some pressures and dilemmas in schools with high overall levels of demand. Similarly, some schools adopted approaches that were more *specifically* targeted at specific learning difficulties than others. Finally, schools differed in their sensitivity to the potential for conflict between parents and the education system. None of these differences in emphasis, however, made it possible to discern *markedly* different approaches in these schools. (Chapter 3)

4. There are some *prima facie* grounds for believing that there might be conflict between the whole school approach as evidenced in schools' Learning Support work, and the demands made by pupils with specific learning difficulties. In fact, schools

find the whole school approach, including the notions of the Learning Support teacher's roles and of 'parents as partners', a useful model on which to base their specific learning difficulties provision. However, that model is treated as a menu rather than a blueprint; that is, schools select particular aspects of the approach and balance them differently for different groups of pupils, or, indeed, for individuals. This approach has created opportunities within schools for generalising targeted approaches to wider groups of pupils, and for raising the awareness and willingness to collaborate of mainstream staff. However, it is also a very demanding and resource-intensive variant of the whole school approach, and some schools are concerned about their continued ability to meet those demands effectively. (Chapter 4)

5. The report develops a model which schools can use to evaluate and develop their own provision for pupils with specific learning difficulties. The model will also allow schools to explain their work and make themselves accountable to parents and other interested parties. Specific recommendations are made about the use of this model, the support which schools will need in developing their provision, and the direction of future research. (Chapter 5)

CHAPTER 1 : THE STUDY AND ITS BACKGROUND

Introduction

This report presents the findings of a research project undertaken by the Special Needs Research Group in the Department of Education, University of Newcastle upon Tyne. The project was sponsored by the Scottish Office Education Department (SOED) and took place over the course of the academic year 1993-1994.

Background to the study

The whole school approach

Provision for pupils with special needs in ordinary secondary schools has for many years been underpinned by the notion of the 'whole school approach' (Dessent, 1987). Scotland has been particularly fortunate in having been able to base provision on an early articulation of this approach (SED, 1978) which has allowed it to develop a sophisticated system of Learning Support, with clear national and Regional guidelines, comprehensive role definitions for Learning Support teachers, and a thoroughgoing programme of staff training.

Although the origins and aims of the whole school approach are complex and have been interpreted somewhat differently in different schools, it is probably fair to say that its impetus came partly from a dissatisfaction with the perspectives which were at that time dominant in thinking about special needs. As Tomlinson pointed out at the time (Tomlinson, 1982) there was a widespread acceptance of the notion that children's learning difficulties could be understood solely in terms of their psychological or medical deficits and could be addressed through targeted interventions aimed at remedying those deficits. However, this psycho-medical perspective was coming to seem overly narrow and restrictive when applied to the educational needs of "all pupils in the lower half of the ability range with learning difficulties." (SED 1978, 1.10) Since most children with learning difficulties did not have any gross psychological or medical deficits, it was beginning to seem probable that their difficulties could best be addressed by offering them *appropriate* rather than *remedial* teaching (Gains, 1980; Galletley, 1976; Golby & Gulliver, 1979).

Hence, one of the primary foci of the new approach was on ensuring curriculum appropriateness for all pupils. The HMI progress report (SED, 1978), for instance, was very much concerned with the limited focus and effectiveness of remedial work

as it was then organised, arguing that subject specialists had to take their share of responsibility for pupils with learning difficulties, and that provision had, in large part, to be made through appropriate differentiation of the mainstream curriculum. This thrust sat well with an increasing emphasis throughout the education system on the value of a common educational experience (*via* comprehensive schooling) and of a common curriculum for *all* children. In recent years, this emphasis has been increased and formalised by the establishment of the 5-14 Curriculum, and has led to a further re-examination of the means whereby curriculum access and appropriateness can be assured for pupils with special needs (Scottish CCC, 1993).

In turn, these developments have led to major changes in the role of special needs teachers in ordinary schools. Remedial specialists, with a narrow focus on the teaching of basic skills (particularly literacy) in withdrawal situations, have given way to Learning Support teachers, with a much broader brief. The emphasis on appropriate and accessible educational experiences has led these teachers to balance their direct interventions in respect of individual pupils with consultancy, co-operative teaching and staff development work which is aimed at curriculum development as much as at 'remediating' individual pupils' deficits.

This new role required complex skills, and, indeed, the new approach as a whole required sophisticated management at whole-school level. Nonetheless, it is probably fair to say that, by the time of the present study (1993-94), there was widespread acceptance of the principle that "pupils' special educational needs are largely met through an effective curriculum" (Scottish CCC, 1993, part 2, p.3) and of the notion that all pupils are entitled to a curriculum characterised by breadth, balance, coherence, continuity and progression. Given this acceptance, it is easy to underestimate the extent of the changes that have taken place since 1978 and to overlook the fundamental assumptions about special needs work in ordinary schools that have been rethought in that time.

The emergence of specific learning difficulties

It is within this changing context that concern about children with specific learning difficulties has begun to grow. The idea that some children have difficulties which are 'specific' to certain aspects of learning, but do not have a generalised impact on all areas of the child's functioning is, of course far from new (see, for instance the excellent literature review provided by Riddell, *et al* (1992) or Pumfrey & Reason (1991)). Recent years, however, have seen the emergence not only of a substantial body of literature on the subject but also of increasingly influential parental groups and voluntary associations, which have been remarkably effective in persuading

schools and Regional authorities to review their approach to the specific learning difficulties issue (Riddell *et al*, 1994).

There is considerable divergence and even conflict about definitions and conceptualisations of specific learning difficulties both within the literature (Pumfrey & Reason, 1991) and between stakeholders in the education system (Riddell *et al.*, 1992). Nonetheless, it is probably true to say that there is an overall tendency for such difficulties to be conceptualised in terms of the very psycho-medical perspectives which have been questioned by the whole school approach. The British Dyslexia Association, for instance, argues that specific learning difficulties are "constitutional in origin"; the Dyslexia Institute traces functional problems to limited competencies "in information processing, in motor skills and working memory" (Pumfrey and Reason, 1991, p. 15); and Riddell *et al* (1994) found that representatives of Dyslexia Associations were adamant that children with specific learning difficulties did not form part of the continuum of general learning difficulties. Some time after the establishment of a common curriculum, and long after the formulation of the whole school approach, therefore, the literature on specific learning difficulties continues to seek for psycho-medical origins and treatments for specific learning difficulties (see, for instance, Stone & Harris, 1991, Stein & Fowler, 1993, Wright & Groner, 1993).

It is not necessary to enter the debates in this highly conflicted area to see that the persistence of the psycho-medical perspective poses some significant challenges to schools seeking to operate a whole school approach. There are four in particular that deserve attention:

1. The nature of interventions

The psycho-medical focus of much inquiry in the field of specific learning difficulties has, not surprisingly, led to the advocacy of psycho-medically oriented responses. These range from well-established remedial reading techniques (usefully summarised by Hicks, 1986) to quasi-medical interventions such as the wearing of tinted lenses (Stone & Harris, 1991) and Educational Kinesiology (see appendix A). Regardless of the effectiveness or otherwise of these interventions, they are often not designed to be readily applicable in the context of the ordinary classroom and common curriculum, nor do they offer any ready means of providing children with access to that curriculum. Hence, some of the best-established interventions — *Alpha to Omega* (Hornsby & Shear, 1975), the Hickey method (Hickey, 1992) or the *Bangor Dyslexia Teaching System* (Miles, 1989), for instance — seem to

depend upon one-to-one or small-group tuition which is not clearly related to the *full* scope of the 5-14 curriculum.

Given this focus, it is not surprising that some parents and parental associations are sceptical as to the effectiveness of Learning Support approaches as currently understood. Instead, they tend to advocate interventions which can only take place outside the ordinary classroom and, in some cases, outside the ordinary school, valuing expert tuition and structured remedial work at least as highly as access to all aspects of the curriculum (Riddell *et al* 1994). Clearly, there is a challenge for schools to reconcile these parental views and these 'extra-curricular' interventions with a form of Learning Support provision which places a high value on curriculum access.

2. The lack of guidance on provision

Similarly, it is not surprising that psycho-medical perspectives on specific learning difficulties have led to a relative neglect in the literature of strategies which schools might use to structure their provision for this group of children. Although the particular interventions being advocated may be clearly-articulated, their management within the timetable, the role to be played by Learning Support and subject staff, and the resourcing of provision are very much under-researched and under-reported issues. It is significant, for instance, that Pumfrey and Reason's otherwise excellent survey of the field (1991) has very little to say on provision for specific learning difficulties that is more than a rehearsal of good practice in special needs work generally. Even the professional journals, which were particularly influential in articulating the emerging whole school approach, seem to have had little to say on how responses to specific learning difficulties might be structured, managed and resourced.

3. Dilemmas for Learning Support teachers

Despite the careful elaboration of the Learning Support teacher's role in Scotland, it has by no means proved easy to operate that role in practice or, in particular, to strike an appropriate balance between direct tuition, consultancy and co-operative teaching (Allan, Brown, & Munn, 1991; SOED, 1993). This may be part of a wider set of dilemmas which all special needs teachers face (Norwich, 1993), and which have, in recent years, led to calls for radical redefinitions of that role (Dyson, 1990). The emergence of specific learning difficulties as an issue makes these dilemmas particularly acute, raising as it does questions as to the nature and adequacy of the Learning Support

teacher's expertise, the distribution of time and effort between direct tuition and other aspects of the role, and the distribution of responsibility for responding to special needs as between Learning Support teachers and their subject teacher colleagues.

4. Dilemmas in the whole school approach

Underpinning each of these challenges is a more fundamental challenge to established practices in mainstream special needs work. The whole school approach was, as we have seen, formulated on principles of access and equity, targeted at the broad continuum of children with learning difficulties, and realised through a curriculum-led approach to special needs. The emergence of the specific learning difficulties issue, however, requires schools to engage with needs which are seen in terms of remediation, are held to be distinct from those of other children with learning difficulties, and are believed not to be susceptible to curriculum-led interventions. This raises the fundamental question as to whether the whole school approach, given its current structures and practices, is capable of responding effectively to such needs, or whether some radical rethink of special needs provision in ordinary schools is indicated.

This, of course, is not simply an issue which concerns provision for children with specific learning difficulties. There is a more general question as to whether the principles of access and equity which the whole school approach embodies can be reconciled with the equally important principle of providing each child with an individually-appropriate education. It may well be that, as schools begin to reflect upon their now well-established whole-school approaches and, in particular, as the voice of individual parents of children with special needs becomes even more clearly heard, this issue will become increasingly important.

The current study

Research questions and intended outcomes

The current study is an attempt to inform debate on the issues which have been outlined above. Its focus is the provision which secondary schools in Scotland are making for pupils with specific learning difficulties, and this focus is elaborated in terms of four research questions:

- Insofar as secondary schools are making responses to specific learning difficulties, what are those responses, and do they fall into a pattern of 'types' ?
- In what ways are schools reconciling the 'specific' needs of specific learning difficulties children with their existing whole school approaches ?
- What are the implications of schools' responses for the work of Learning Support teachers ?
- In what ways are schools perceiving and making use of opportunities (for instance in terms of resourcing and self-evaluation) provided by children with specific learning difficulties for enhancing other aspects of their provision ?

It was anticipated at the outset of the project that the answers to these questions would lead to a number of useful outcomes:

- A data base of provision for specific learning difficulties schools contributing to the project, which can be used for networking purposes and as the basis of further research
- Case studies of schools' approaches to specific learning difficulties against which practitioners and decision-makers can match their own approaches
- A typology of such approaches which can be used to aid decision-making in schools and at Regional and national level, and which can also be used to inform future research and evaluation projects
- Guidance on how schools might address the issues raised and maximise the opportunities provided by children with specific learning difficulties
- An analysis of the implications of the 'case' of specific learning difficulties for understanding of the whole school approach and for special needs policy at school, Regional and national levels.

In particular, it was anticipated that the school-level focus of this research would complement the teacher- and stakeholder-focus of work already sponsored by SOED (Riddell *et al* 1992), and would thus contribute to a growing knowledge-base relating to specific learning difficulties provision in Scotland.

In view of the conflicted nature of this field, it is perhaps as well to set alongside these aims and intended outcomes some indication of what the study does *not* attempt:

- The study does not attempt any formal evaluation of school's approaches. In particular, no attempt has been made to evaluate the approaches currently adopted by schools against those advocated by other stakeholders. Important as such evaluations undoubtedly are as a next step, it seems sensible to begin by describing and analysing what schools are doing.

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- The study does not engage with the issue of what constitute 'specific learning difficulties', the extent to which they can be differentiated from other learning difficulties, or their relationship to concepts such as 'dyslexia' or 'reading disability'. Again, these are important issues but they are already much debated in the existing psycho-medical literature. It seems more useful to focus on the phenomena as they most immediately present themselves to teachers and schools — that is that some children do markedly worse in some areas of their learning than their performance in other areas might lead one to expect. Throughout, therefore, the study operates with a definition of specific learning difficulties based on this notion of unevenness of performance (see appendix C) which undoubtedly disguises a multitude of individual differences, but which serves to identify a group of children who might seem to demand a response from schools somewhat different from the response made to children with other forms of special need.
- The study focuses on secondary maintained schools and on teachers within them, rather than on other sorts of school or other stakeholders. It will, of course, be important to build both on this work and on the current study, particularly by extending it into primary schools and by involving parents in any evaluation.
- Since a major aim of the study was to provide schools with ideas and information which might help them formulate their own responses to specific learning difficulties, our inquiry restricts itself to those schools which had already developed explicit forms of provision. In other words, the study is not conceived as a comprehensive survey of the forms of provision made in all schools across the country. The schools contributing to the study, therefore, may or may not be typical of other secondary schools in Scotland, and this might well form the basis of an important question for future research.

Methodology

(NB further details of methodology can be found in appendix D)

The study worked through the following phases :

Nomination

SOED indicated that it would be appropriate to invite five Regions to participate in the study — Borders, Dumfries and Galloway, Fife, Highland and Tayside. These Regions were known to have schools which had developed distinctive approaches to specific learning difficulties, but unlike other potential participants, had not recently been the site of intensive research activity.

The Director of Education in each Region was contacted and invited to nominate schools which:

1. had a well-established 'whole-school approach' to special needs
2. had, or were developing, their own in-school responses to pupils with specific learning difficulties.

Rather than nominating *all* schools which met these criteria, Regions were asked to nominate a sample of such schools which would display the range of approaches that schools were beginning to adopt. In the event, some 41 schools were nominated from across the Regions (see appendix E for an analysis of responses by Region).

Questionnaire survey

Each of the nominated schools was invited to complete a questionnaire describing their approach to specific learning difficulties. Some 27 schools (66% of those nominated) responded. The questionnaire consisted of a series of largely open-response questions seeking information on numbers of pupils with specific learning difficulties in the school, the school's understanding of the concept of specific learning difficulties, the provision made by the school and the relationship between this provision and the school's approach to other forms of special needs (see appendix C). Schools were also invited to submit supporting documentation (such as Learning Support policies).

Case study work

Six of the responding schools were selected for more intensive case study. They submitted additional documentation relating to their work, and one or more members of the research team visited them in order to see their approach at work and to interview key personnel. Since the schools had already described their approach in general terms on the questionnaire, a sharper focus was brought to the case study by asking schools to identify a pupil they regarded as typical of those with specific learning difficulties with whom they had to deal. In addition to the Rector and Principal Teacher Learning Support (PTLS), therefore, it was this child's teachers (English, Maths and others as available) who were interviewed, and all interviews focused initially on provision for this child — though subsequently broadening out to include other aspects of the school's approach (see appendix C for interview schedules).

In addition to these visits, specific aspects of provision were investigated by telephone interviews in other schools as appropriate.

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Comparative research

It addition to the Scottish study, it seemed advantageous to carry out small-scale studies in English secondary schools for comparative purposes. Despite the many similarities between the Scottish and English education systems, a number of differences are apparent (particularly since the 1988 Education Reform Act in England) which may be relevant to the sorts of provision schools make for children with specific learning difficulties :

- The effect of devolving budgets increasingly from local education authorities (LEAs) to schools has been to shift the balance between the two partners in the management of special needs provision. English secondary schools in particular have a significant level of autonomy in determining the form and resourcing of their response to special needs.
- The notion of a common entitlement curriculum has been interpreted somewhat differently in Scotland and England. The emphasis in the English National Curriculum and its associated assessment procedures has been on differentiation within a common entitlement for all children. There has perhaps been less overt emphasis on the notion of alternative pathways and adaptations than in the Scottish 5-14 Curriculum, with the consequence that strategies for accessing children with special needs to the curriculum have been a major concern of English special educators.
- Anecdotal evidence would suggest that the salience of specific learning difficulties as an issue and the history of that issue vary widely from area to area. By including some comparative work, it is possible to draw upon LEAs where specific learning difficulties have been a major issue for many years and where well-established and heavily-resourced forms of provision can be found.

For all these reasons, it seemed likely that English data would add to the diversity of approaches that could be studied, and would thus guard against presenting a falsely uniform picture. Accordingly, the following data were collected from English schools :

i) Three English LEAs with a history of extensive specific learning difficulties provision (Cleveland, Cumbria and Devon) were invited to nominate schools in the same way as the Scottish Regional authorities. Ten nominated schools agreed to complete the questionnaire, and their returns were supplemented by responses from an opportunity sample of a further four schools from three LEAs.

ii) Five schools nominated by one LEA (Cleveland) were invited to take part in a cost-benefit evaluation of their approaches to specific learning difficulties provision.

iii) The findings of the earlier Innovatory Mainstream Practice Project, (Dyson, 1992; Dyson, Millward, & Skidmore, 1994) were re-examined to identify examples of interesting specific learning difficulties provision.

iv) A questionnaire survey was conducted of specific learning difficulties provision in the middle and high schools of one LEA. (Although the detailed findings of the survey are confidential to the LEA, they inform the more general comments made elsewhere in this report.)

A full analysis of the English data is presented in appendix B.

Limitations of the methodology

It is important to bear in mind that this project comprises a small-scale piece of research aimed principally at identifying and analysing models of specific learning difficulties provision as they are beginning to emerge in schools. Two particular limitations need to be borne in mind in order that its findings can be used productively and with confidence.

First, the research relies heavily on self-reporting by schools. The research team did not set out to gather evidence on the important question of how far actual practice matches espoused rhetoric in schools. Neither did we set out to gather evaluative evidence on how effective schools' practice was. The question the research addresses therefore is what schools *believe* themselves to be doing and *claim* to be doing. This question is limited in its scope, of course, but its importance is that the accounts of practice and provision given by one school may well help other schools to clarify their own approaches.

The second limitation concerns the homogeneity of both the Scottish and English samples. The participating Scottish Regions are somewhat homogeneous both in their demographics and in their policies towards specific learning difficulties — none of the Regions contained a major conurbation or pursued a policy of unit provision, for instance. The English LEAs, too, are all shire counties. This homogeneity is by no means absolute : responding schools in Scotland and England ranged from small rural schools to larger urban schools and very large schools serving an extensive mixed urban and rural catchment area; the English sample in particular included schools in areas of some urban deprivation and was nominated by LEAs with very different histories and forms of specific learning difficulties provision. Nonetheless, this

research does not constitute a national survey and it is, therefore, not impossible that alternative models of provision have emerged in schools elsewhere to meet different social conditions and Regional policies.

Summary

Provision for pupils with special educational needs in ordinary schools has, in recent years, been dominated by a 'whole school approach' which has placed an emphasis on the development of an appropriate curriculum and on a wide-ranging role for Learning Support teachers. However, concern about pupils with specific learning difficulties, which has grown of late, appears to have been dominated by the psycho-medical perspectives which the whole school approach has, to some extent, rejected. This situation creates dilemmas and tensions for schools, leaving them with little guidance as to appropriate forms of provision. The current research was undertaken to investigate these dilemmas and tensions, and, by studying the responses actually being made by schools, to offer practical guidance.

CHAPTER 2 : SCHOOLS' APPROACHES TO PROVISION FOR PUPILS WITH SPECIFIC LEARNING DIFFICULTIES

Introduction: a common approach ?

Although the sample of schools used in this research was relatively small (see chapter 1), it was nonetheless drawn from five Regions, each with its own form of Learning Support provision and its own approach to specific learning difficulties. Moreover, the schools ranged in size from under 200 to over 1500 pupils, and in location from small market towns serving rural catchments to heavily urbanised areas. It was anticipated, therefore, that provision for specific learning difficulties within these schools would display a similarly wide range of approach and form, and that it would prove possible to construct a typology of approaches against which other schools could match their own work.

In the event, this was only partly the case. There were certainly many differences in the detail of schools' provision, and some important differences in the contexts within which they worked. Nonetheless, there was also a remarkable uniformity in the fundamental approach which seemed to underpin schools' work. Any differences between schools seemed more like variations on that shared approach than fundamentally different approaches. This remained true even when statistical analyses were carried out on the data to see if any distinct clusters of forms of provision could be found (see appendix D), and, even more surprisingly, when the data from the comparative studies in England were taken into account (see appendix B).

The conclusion therefore would seem to be that the work reported by schools in this sample can be regarded as constituting a single *approach* to how specific learning difficulties provision might be made. It is possible that this approach is simply one amongst a number that are emerging across the country. However, it has a coherence, and practicability that seem likely to recommend it to schools in a wide range of circumstances. We propose, therefore, to set out this approach in terms of :

- *Conceptualisation of Specific Learning Difficulties* : what schools understand specific learning difficulties to be
- *Rationale for Specific Learning Difficulties Provision* : why schools do what they do for pupils with specific learning difficulties, and what they hope to achieve by so doing

- *Provision for Specific Learning Difficulties* : what schools actually do for pupils with specific learning difficulties.

Differences of emphasis between schools' interpretation and implementation of this approach will be discussed in a later chapter.

Conceptualisation of Specific Learning Difficulties

Specific learning difficulties tended to be seen by responding schools in terms of difficulties in particular functional areas. These difficulties were seen to occur most commonly in the area of literacy skills, particularly spelling, writing and reading, though a significant number of pupils were identified as having specific difficulties in mathematics, and a small number as having other forms of difficulty, e.g. in spatial awareness or self-organisation (see Chart 1). Such difficulties give rise to a discrepancy between the pupil's *functional performance* in a given area, and their *conceptual ability*, which is usually regarded as at least average, and may be high. "In other words," as one school put it,

> there is a discrepancy between what a pupil can do and understand and what he/she can show he/she can do and understand.

Another school defined specific difficulties as:

> Any marked anomaly in a pupil's overall cognitive profile, indicating a significant discrepancy between expected and actual performance in any given area.

One third of schools offered definitions of specific learning difficulties which made use of this idea of a discrepancy, in many cases drawing attention to the disparity between the pupil's oral contributions and written performance. One respondent used the metaphor of a 'jagged profile' to convey this sense of variable performance; another described specific difficulties as difficulties which are "uncharacteristic of the pupil". It is also important to note that the impact of specific difficulties might be seen as confined to a subset of a given area of functioning : for example, two schools visited by the project identified pupils who were described as having good reading and comprehension skills, but being weak in writing and spelling.

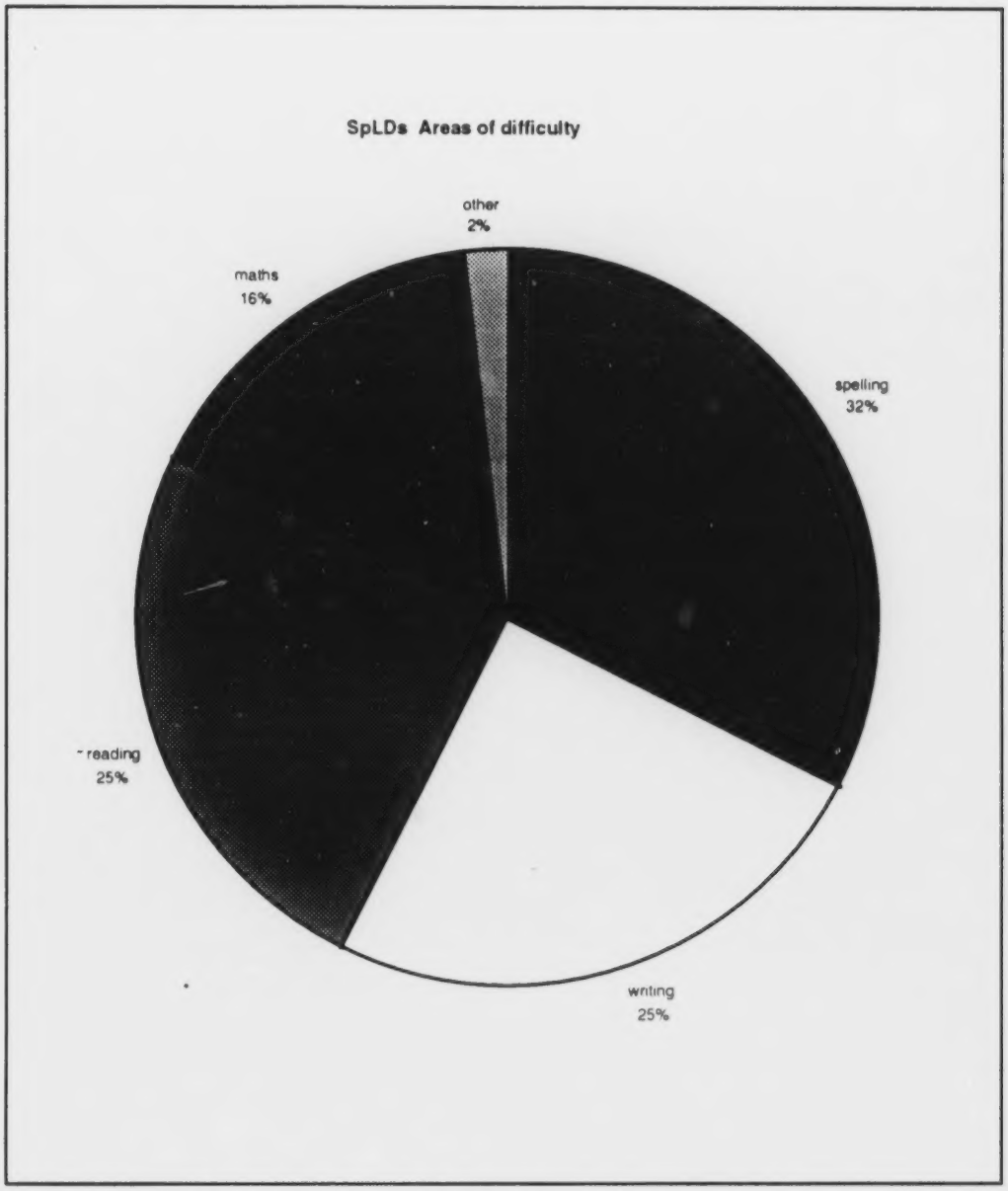

Chart 1

Specific learning difficulties were thus seen by responding schools as distinct from other forms of learning difficulty, which are more global in scope, and therefore encompass conceptual difficulties. Most pupils with specific learning difficulties were therefore seen as able to cope with the conceptual content of the mainstream curriculum; they are, however, put at a disadvantage by the heavy reliance it places on literacy skills. As one school remarked,

> It became clear by observation and HMI reports that certain obviously intelligent pupils were being failed by a system that constantly judged them on a single criterion at which they were bound to fail, i.e. written performance.

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This may be contrasted with the position of pupils with other forms of learning difficulty, for whom the conceptual content of the curriculum may in itself constitute an obstacle.

It is noteworthy that schools displayed a relative lack of concern with the psycho-medical definitions of specific learning difficulty found in the literature. One teacher professed herself to be "not greatly impressed with theories"; rather, what was important was to look at the needs of the individual pupil. In particular, the question of the aetiology of a pupil's difficulties is of secondary importance; what matters far more to schools is whether strategies can be devised which will minimise the adverse impact of their functional difficulties on their ability to learn in the mainstream classroom.

Practice varied with regard to the use of terms such as 'dyslexia', 'dyscalculia' etc. One teacher 'studiously avoided' such terms as counter-productive labelling; another preferred to speak of 'dyslexic tendencies'; but a third made a point of using the word 'dyslexia' when counselling pupils, believing that they are often "relieved when they can be assured that the problem is not just 'laziness' or a generalised learning difficulty". However, common to all schools was a stress on the importance of treating each pupil as an individual with his/her own particular needs : "each dyslexic pupil varies individually," as one interviewee remarked. This may be contrasted with a conceptualisation which would regard dyslexic pupils as a discrete homogeneous group to whom schools should respond in a way determined by the category of their disability. One teacher (whose own children are dyslexic), summed this up as follows:

> Provision is made in response to the needs of the child so the provision for any pupil will be determined by need not 'label'.

Associated with this stress on the pupil as an individual was a strong current of concern for the affective dimension of specific learning difficulties. As one school pointed out, by the time they reach secondary school, pupils with specific learning difficulties may have accrued considerable experience of failure in their prior schooling; it may, therefore, be necessary to "get rid of the emotional baggage first", before it is possible to make much progress academically. Such attention to the affective domain was seen by some teachers as a worthwhile end in itself, but was also seen to pay dividends in an academic sense, greater self-confidence leading to improved attainment:

> we believe the affective development of the pupil ... has a direct effect on their academic development.

These findings would seem to confirm those of Riddell *et al* (1992) when they interviewed Learning Support teachers and other stakeholders about their understandings of specific learning difficulties. They were focusing on individual teacher rather than whole school perceptions, and found some variation from teacher to teacher. Nonetheless, they too found that teachers on the whole inclined to an individualised, non-categorical conceptualisation, and were concerned with responding to the needs of pupils as part of a continuum of learning difficulties rather than with establishing specific learning difficulties as a category in its own right.

It is perhaps worth emphasising that the schools and teachers who responded to our research were not particularly *hostile* to more categorical and psycho-medical conceptualisations. They did not, for instance, engage with such conceptualisations in their own terms and enter the debates which still rage in the psychological literature. It seemed to be more the case that such conceptualisations had little to offer them when faced with the immediate task of enabling particular pupils to function, learn and be happy alongside their peers in the ordinary classroom and the common curriculum. They were "not greatly impressed by theories" because they seemed to have more pressing practical issues to address. Such a practice-oriented conceptualisation is certainly vulnerable to attack on the grounds of being 'atheoretical'. Nonetheless, its strengths as a means of guiding practice are clear.

Rationale for Specific Learning Difficulties Provision

Schools were asked in both the questionnaire survey and the case study interviews to explain the rationale which underpinned their provision for specific learning difficulties — in other words, what they hoped to achieve through that provision and what they saw as its strengths and weaknesses. Their responses were grouped into the 14 categories presented in Chart 2.

A number of features of schools' responses are significant. First, although there was inevitable variation between schools in the rationales they offered, many tended to justify their provision in very similar terms. Hence, rationales based on meeting individual needs, developing self-esteem, ensuring access to the curriculum, promoting integration and helping pupils realise their potential were each cited by a majority of responding schools.

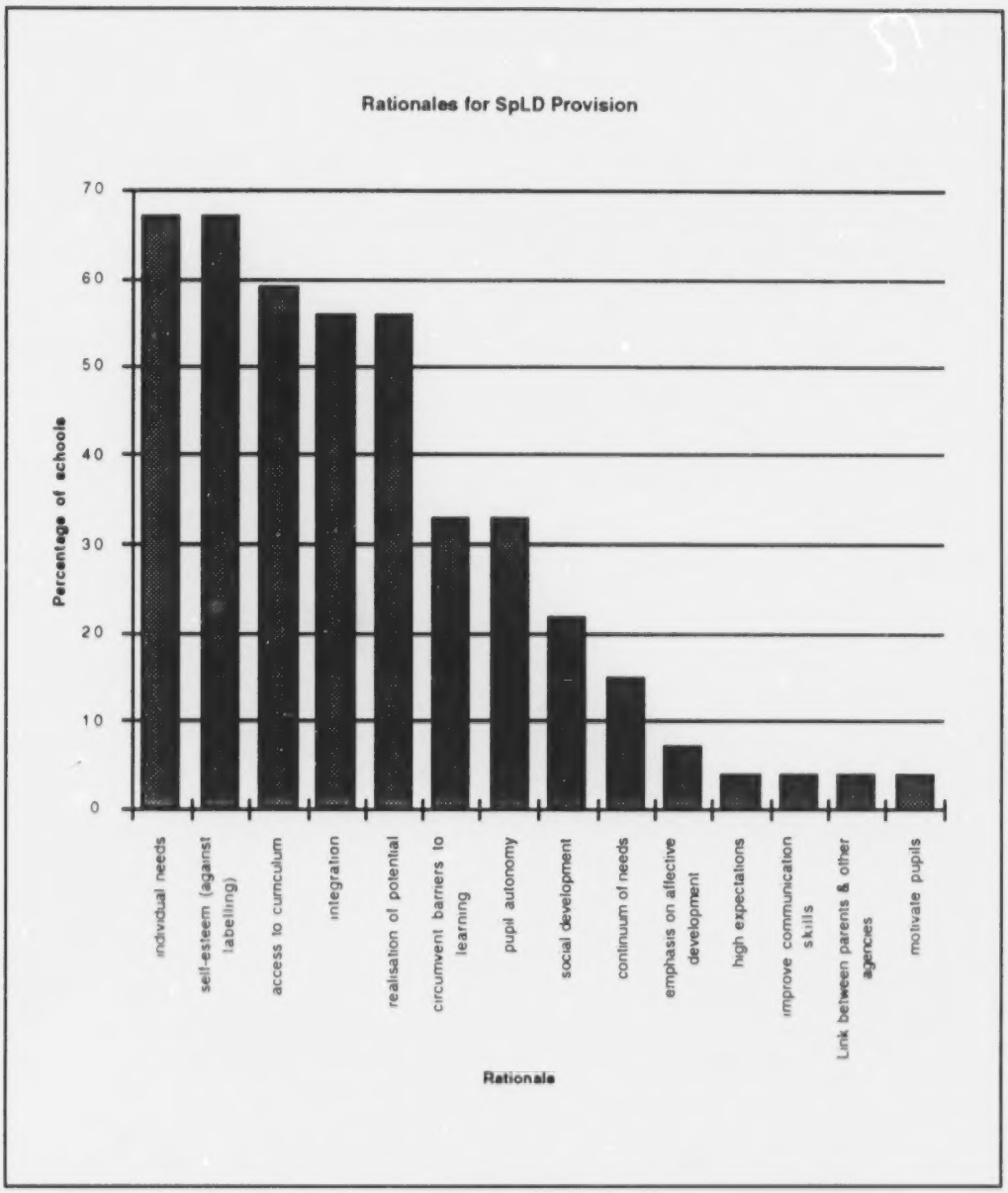

Chart 2

Second, schools tended to cite the more frequently occurring rationales together, justifying their provision in terms of multiple rather than single purposes. The following is a typical response :

> To maintain pupils with specific learning difficulty within the mainstream curriculum (if at all possible) *[access to curriculum]* and provide a service which allows them to perform to their full potential *[realisation of potential]*. Through raised awareness of teachers and technological support ensure encouragement and sense of independence *[pupil autonomy]* which will improve self-esteem *[self-esteem]*.

Not surprisingly, it was not possible to analyse schools' responses into distinct clusters of rationales which would allow us to differentiate between the approaches adopted by schools. In other words, there was a large measure of overlap between schools in terms of the rationales they cited, and those rationales tended to be complementary rather than mutually exclusive.

The third significant feature of schools' responses is the *nature* of the rationales that were put forward — and, indeed, of those that were not. Provision was justified by schools in terms which are consistent with the conceptualisation of specific learning difficulties reported above. Provision seemed to them to be about responding to individual difficulties so that pupils are enabled to become effective learners in the mainstream classroom and common curriculum. It is, notably, *not* about effecting a 'cure' of the pupil's learning difficulty, nor about carrying out technical remedial procedures in isolation from curriculum and classroom. Two schools' responses are illustrative of the subtleties here :

> Our rationale is : to provide access to the mainstream curriculum; improvement in basic skills; appropriate means of circumventing specific learning difficulties in order to enable pupils to achieve their maximum potential and, where appropriate, access to further and higher education; and to raise self-esteem and confidence

> We hope that pupils are able to show what they are capable of, despite their specific difficulties. We hope to give them a range of coping strategies and a sense that they are valued as individuals, and can achieve without undue frustration. We want them to take full part in the life and work of the class and the school.

These responses indicate the way in which the various rationales cohere into an overall statement of purpose. In these examples, the ultimate aim is for pupils to participate in "the mainstream curriculum", taking "a full part in the life and work of the class and the school". By so doing, they will be able to "show what they are capable of" and "achieve their maximum potential". Specific learning difficulties are seen as obstacles in the way of participation, learning and achievement. These obstacles are (implicitly) not seen as susceptible to total or rapid 'cure', but rather have to be 'circumvented' and 'coped with' so that they do not prevent the pupil achieving what s/he can. The school's job is twofold: to give the pupil the best possible coping strategies on the one hand, and to give her/him "a sense that they are valued as individuals", that they are judged not by their difficulties but by their achievements and intrinsic worth, and, therefore, to "raise self-esteem and confidence" so that they will persevere in their efforts to learn.

Although the emphasis varied somewhat from school to school, a rationale of this kind was universal amongst those who responded. It should be noted that such a rationale is very different from what might be expected from a psycho-medical focus on the pupil's 'disability' and on finding ways to cure that disability. Instead, the focus is on the pupil as a whole person, needing to learn in the context of the mainstream school and curriculum and ultimately to function effectively in wider society. It is, in other words, a very 'teacherly' rationale. It is also one, therefore, which is capable of informing provision directly, and it is to this that we now wish to turn.

Provision for Specific Learning Difficulties

Schools were asked by the questionnaire to describe the forms of provision they made for pupils with specific learning difficulties. A total of 33 analytically discrete categories of provision were reported by the 27 responding schools (see appendix E). The number of forms of provision identified by each school ranged from a minimum of 5 to a maximum of 16, with a mode (most frequently occurring value) of 12. Thus one of the prime characteristics of schools' provision for specific learning difficulties is its *eclectic* quality. All schools draw on a range of strategies; no school is locked into one form of provision to the exclusion of alternative approaches.

This is perhaps most noticeable in the case of in-class support (co-operative teaching), on the one hand, and extraction for direct tuition on the other: although there were differences of emphasis between those schools which used extraction 'as a last resort', and those where pupils were integrated 'where appropriate', all schools in fact made use of both forms of provision as part of the repertoire of strategies available to them. (We shall say more on this subject below).

Provision is also *pragmatic*, focusing on what seems to work for a particular child in a given context. A Principal Teacher Learning Support (PTLS) in one of the case study schools, for instance, had made occasional use with selected pupils of Educational Kinesiology (Edu-K), an alternative therapeutic technique developed specifically for the treatment of dyslexia and predicated on a theoretical model of the functioning and dysfunctioning of the brain (see appendix A). This teacher was pleased with the boost in self-confidence which she observed in some pupils following use of the technique, but commented:

> It works with some pupils. It doesn't always show results. ... For me it's another tool.

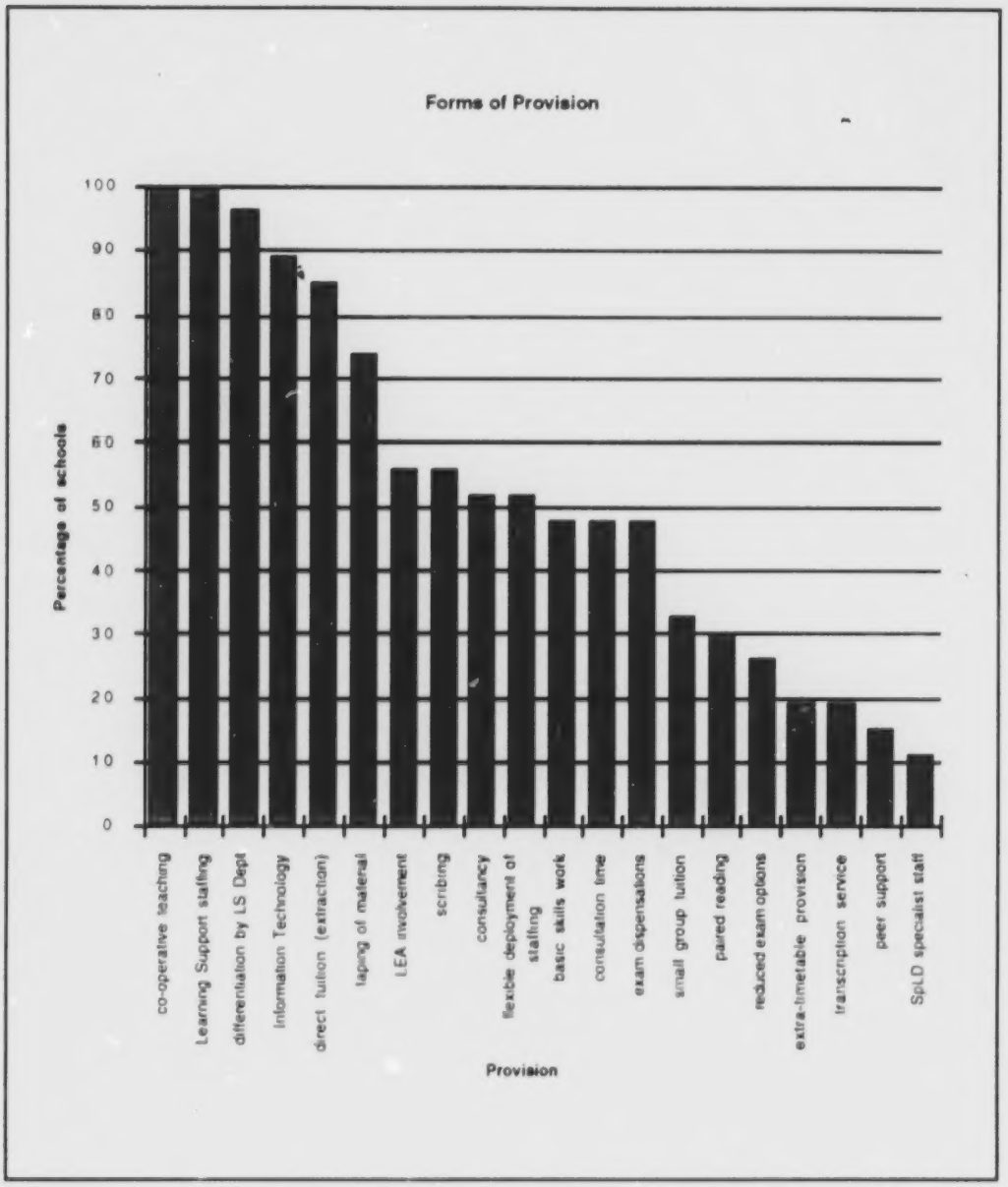

Chart 3

Chart 3 shows the forms of provision cited by more than 10% of responding schools, in descending order of frequency. Other forms of provision, each mentioned by only one or two schools, were: Learning Centre provision; sheltered provision; staffing for home working; counselling; modular courses; negotiation with pupils; outdoor activities; precision teaching; using pupils as volunteers; provision responsive to pupils' needs; special class provision; special unit provision; spelling dictionaries.

Another case study school described the different packages of provision which had been developed for two pupils with Records of Need for specific learning difficulties. In the case of one pupil, they had tried to encourage him to word-process his own work in class, but he had been 'resistant'; as a result, he now made frequent use of a dictaphone to record work, which was subsequently transcribed by members of the Learning Support Department. A second pupil, in contrast, had been offered a dictaphone in the first instance, but had felt self-conscious, so its use was abandoned; instead, she received a lot of support in-class, including scribing of her work, made use of a spelling dictionary provided by the Educational Psychologist, and had begun to make use of a Tandy word processor to draft her own work. In these ways, schools were seen to be quite prepared to vary the forms of provision they make in order to find what works best in practice for a particular pupil.

Provision can thus also be seen to be *responsive* to the views and wishes of the pupil, rather than being dogmatically prescribed in accord with the tenets of a prior theory. In keeping with the stress on the affective well-being of pupils noted above in the section on rationales, an adverse response from a pupil is taken as a sufficient reason for abandoning the pursuit of a particular strategy; and, conversely, a positive response by a pupil to a form of intervention is seen as its own justification. Such responsiveness should not be mistaken for an abnegation of the teacher's responsibility; as one PTLS remarked:

> It is a central tenet that if the youngster doesn't want support, don't give them it — but be ready for 'hands-off' provision and keep offering help.

Consequently, provision is not so much geared towards the 'category' of pupils with specific learning difficulties as it is *customised* for individual pupils. It is appropriate to recall the comment of the PTLS quoted above :

> ... the provision for any pupil will be determined by need not 'label'.

Or, as another teacher put it,

> We try anything — we wouldn't do the same thing with two pupils.

Schools, therefore, did not so much have a single standard form of provision as a 'menu' from which a particular package of intervention and support could be selected for individual pupils. In this respect, it is interesting to consider the extent to which specific learning difficulties provision might be seen as somewhat different from more general learning support provision. Although the latter is individualised in the

sense that particular learning tasks are geared to particular individuals, it might nonetheless be the case that the same broad forms of provision (typically differentiation with some in-class support) are made for all.

This *eclectic, pragmatic, responsive* and *customised* approach to provision is perhaps most clearly evident in the way schools tackled the thorny issue of extracting pupils from their mainstream classes. We have seen when examining schools' rationales that there was a shared commitment to enabling pupils to participate in a common curriculum alongside their peers. However, this commitment is not 'doctrinaire'; it does not over-ride all other considerations. Schools would typically comment on this issue in these sorts of terms :

> There's no reason to interfere with a child's learning if they're coping.
>
> Where a pupil can cope with mainstream curriculum, we would want them to be in curriculum as much as possible, but they can benefit from withdrawal and one to one.
>
> Pupils have an entitlement to access the curriculum but they do not have to be physically in the classroom at all times.
>
> It all depends on the balance of advantage for the child.

Here we can see schools balancing their commitment to the principle of participation with the practical considerations of what 'works' for particular pupils in particular circumstances. Viewed in this light, the conflict between withdrawal and curriculum access is one which is not resolved in terms of unchanging principles so much as in terms of particular cases and particular needs. To this extent, provision for pupils with specific learning difficulties cuts across some of the major dividing lines in mainstream special needs work and begins to open up some interesting alternative approaches — a theme to which we shall return in due course.

For the moment, however, it may be useful to elaborate on some of the major forms of provision identified by schools.

Forms of provision

Identification strategies

Much emphasis is placed in the literature on specific learning difficulties on the importance of correct identification of pupils, and there is a continuing drive to develop tests which will diagnose such difficulties sooner or more accurately (Fawcett, Pickering, & Nicolson, 1993). Five of the responding schools were indeed

making use of specialist tests and assessment strategies such as the Aston Index and Bangor Dyslexia Test (see appendix A). However, these tools were not used in isolation, and a much more common pattern was for a wide range of assessment techniques to be used. These typically included:

- tests of attainment which had not been developed exclusively for the identification of specific learning difficulties
- information supplied by primary schools
- classroom observation
- referrals from class teachers
- expressions of concern from parents
- specialist assessment by educational psychologists (usually after other forms of assessment have established a 'cause for concern').

The way in which these various strategies interrelated is indicated by a typical questionnaire response :

> Most are identified by primary school. [Others] by observation — a mismatch becomes clear quite quickly in a classroom. Teachers refer pupils (mostly from English) whose talk quality far outstrips written work. Primary records are scanned — looking for clues like "lazy — disorganised — concentration problems" etc. Quick reference reading test may be administered. Those pupils needing further investigation are referred to Ed. Psych. Close eye is kept on progress of these pupils.

It is interesting to note that this is a *staged* assessment process. The first stage in identification is very much located in the classroom and the curriculum; the aim appears to be to identify pupils who are failing to participate in or learn from the curriculum, but where there is evidence that the reason for this failure is not an overall lack of ability. Only then is it appropriate to 'check out' this preliminary identification by testing — and only if problematic aspects of the pupil's functioning still remain is referral for specialist assessment deemed necessary.

Such a model of identification and assessment is, of course, entirely consistent with the conceptualisation of specific learning difficulties explored earlier in this chapter. It is perhaps also worth noting that it locates the assessment process at the classroom level and identifies the appropriate expertise for that process as the curriculum-based expertise which is properly the province of teachers.

Co-operative teaching

All schools reported the use of co-operative teaching in the classroom between Learning Support and subject teachers, aimed at offering support to identified pupils.

Interviewees in the case study schools described how the assistance of another member of staff in reading curricular materials with pupils, and scribing their responses, was of particular benefit to pupils with specific difficulties in reading and writing. The additional support, however, did not necessarily come from a Learning Support teacher. In one case study school an auxiliary accompanied one pupil with a Record of Need in English lessons. The English teacher described how the pupil concerned 'supplied the ideas' while the auxiliary scribed; this allowed the pupil to produce written work of a high standard commensurate with his perceived intelligence, and released the subject teacher to circulate and assist other, weaker pupils in the class. In Science, the auxiliary was on hand to assist the same pupil when necessary, but she would also 'buzz around' and help other pupils with the organisation and presentation of their work.

Direct tuition

All case study schools made use of direct remedial intervention using structured teaching approaches — often, as we have seen above, in an extraction situation. One school with a high number of pupils with specific learning difficulties openly acknowledged that it 'trafficked in withdrawal' to a greater extent than other schools in its neighbourhood, commonly extracting these pupils from a significant part of the timetable in the first two years to give extra practice in English. Another school preferred to make minimal use of extraction for social reasons, but permitted the withdrawal of pupils for a limited period for a specific purpose, as in the case of one boy with specific learning difficulties whose behaviour had given cause for concern; in extraction, he was given basic skills practice in English and Maths. It is further worth remarking that, as one interviewee put it, "There can be direct tuition in the classroom".

Differentiation

Differentiation of classroom teaching materials was universally mentioned as an aspect of provision. The particular techniques being used drew upon approaches — individualised tasks, linguistically simplified worksheets, alternative means of recording, and so on — which are becoming increasingly familiar as schools come to terms with the implications of the 5-14 Curriculum for pupils with special educational needs.

However, it was interesting to note the genuine partnerships that were being entered into between Learning Support and subject teachers in developing these approaches. Differentiation proceeded not by policy dictat or by well-intentioned advice, but by pairs of teachers working together on particular units of work. Some respondents

suggested that the presence of pupils with specific learning difficulties within the school had made such partnerships easier. Such pupils, with their relatively high conceptual ability and their specific functional weaknesses have an evident need for differentiated approaches which many subject teachers are eager to accept. Moreover, some teachers reported how, once differentiated approaches had been developed for pupils with specific learning difficulties, they could be generalised to other pupils, thus bringing about an enhancement of the overall quality of teaching and learning.

Information Technology and Audio-Visual Resources

The use of IT and AV resources was cited by most responding schools as a component of their provision for specific learning difficulties. In the case study schools, some technologies — laptop word processors (Tandys); pocket spellcheckers; dictaphones for the recording of work by pupils; and the recording on to cassette of curricular materials by staff — were in widespread use. Clearly, such aids sit particularly well with an approach aimed at helping pupils circumvent rather than confront their difficulties, though as one school (where use of such technology was well advanced) stressed, they should be seen as an *addition* to a repertoire of strategies, not as a substitute for more traditional forms of intervention.

The PTLS in this school also pointed out the need to educate pupils in the use of this technology. A group of S1 pupils with Records of Need for specific learning difficulties had been extracted from part of their English timetable in the first term to learn how to use their laptop computers (whilst at the same time working on some of the same topics covered by their peers in English). Then the pupils returned to the mainstream class, taking the laptops with them into lessons where appropriate.
A successful example of the tape recording of curricular materials was also described in this school. A Learning Support teacher became concerned at the disadvantage suffered by 'dyslexic' children in revision of vocabulary in Modern Languages. She described how she had arranged a consultation period with the class teacher, and put on to tape the vocabulary pertinent to a particular assessment test. The Modern Languages Department had been impressed with the idea, and planned to extend its use to all pupils.

In addition to established forms of IT, two case study schools were trialling the use of Co-Writer, a word processing program incorporating a tool known as a Predictive Adaptive Lexicon (PAL). This program has received considerable publicity in the educational press as potentially of major benefit to pupils with specific difficulties in literacy; it promises drastically to reduce the number of keystrokes necessary to compose a document by prompting the user to select from a list of words suggested

by the program as expected continuations of what the user has already typed. At the time of the visits, this program was new to the schools, and its utility was still being evaluated by them. (See Appendix A for further details of this program.)

Fostering independent learning

In keeping with the view of pupils with specific learning difficulties as conceptually able, there was some evidence in the case study schools of an emphasis on the teaching of higher-order cognitive skills (as opposed, for example, to an exclusive emphasis on the reinforcement of basic skills). One interviewee commented:

> For [specific learning difficulties] pupils, you have to teach memory skills, organisational skills. You have to give them hooks to hang facts on, for example the use of a homework diary. ... We are looking at metacognitive skills.

This school also made an attempt to address what it saw as a gap in the curriculum which might particularly disadvantage pupils with specific learning difficulties, *viz.* the requirement to conduct investigations as part of assessment for Highers. Here, some pupils were extracted from certain subjects for training in investigative learning skills.

Another school saw the aim of direct tuition in literacy skills as a means of fostering pupil autonomy; an investment *now* in tuition in literacy skills, although costly in terms of time and resources, might pay dividends *later* in enabling pupils to cope more autonomously with the demands of the mainstream classroom :

> The idea is we want them to be as independent as possible, and to build up literacy skills. ...We are trying to build up their reading, so we won't have to take them all out and read to them

A third school gave the example of an optional course which had benefited a pupil with a Record of Needs for specific learning difficulties, described by his English teacher as "a good reader, a very reluctant writer, an awful speller". The PTLS explained:

> We have a second year option — a Skills Development course for pupils with learning difficulties — [he] gets help there. The work is set by Learning Support (but in contact with subject departments).

In a fourth school, a Mathematics teacher was an active participant in a Regional initiative in the teaching of Thinking and Philosophy skills. This had not been targeted at children with specific difficulties, but the teacher regarded the approach as

potentially of benefit to all his pupils, including a pupil with specific numeracy difficulties in his class. This pupil had at first experienced difficulties in asking for and accepting assistance from the teacher; the teacher hoped that the emphasis placed by this initiative on the child as a 'social animal', and its emphasis on learning as a social activity (stressing the use of group problem-solving activities rather than working in isolation), would reduce some of the tension and stress experienced by the pupil in whole class activities.

Counselling

Attention has already been drawn to the importance attached by schools to the emotional and affective well-being of pupils. Two case study schools described the availability of counselling techniques to support pupils in this regard. One Guidance teacher, who was a trained counsellor, explained:

> Pupils sometimes get frustrated. I liaise with class teachers, and I can provide counselling, tapes for stress, etc.

In another school, the PTLS laid heavy stress on the importance of enhancing self-esteem, and summed up her aim as:

> to help pupils to overcome a poor self-image, because it produces problems with learning if you emphasise problems. ... They've got to feel they can achieve something.

This teacher made occasional use of a particular therapeutic technique (Edu-K, see above) which had addressed this need for some pupils, but was at pains to point out that emotional support for pupils can be provided in regular classroom interactions, or in informal discussions, as well as in formal counselling sessions.

Reduction of curriculum demands

Mention has already been made of the use of extraction. In many schools, this was short-term and targeted at particular difficulties or teaching points. In some, however, this arrangement was more formalised and on a longer-term basis, for some pupils at least. One such school, although committed to the principle of integration, mentioned that there was a group of three pupils with specific literacy difficulties who had 'dropped a column in timetable', i.e. they were taking one fewer standard grade examinations than their peers. These pupils received extra help with work in other subject areas. The possibility of such reduction of the timetable was available if needed for other pupils, but was regarded by the school as the exception rather than the rule.

In a second school, a policy of reducing curriculum demands on pupils with specific difficulties was pursued on a regular basis. Where pupils were seen to be struggling with the literacy demands of the curriculum, the school consulted with parents and offered to extract the pupil from Modern Languages, with parental approval, in order to provide extra support with English portfolio work. This was seen to benefit these pupils by giving them greater access to teachers who understood the requirements of examination work in this subject area, and possessed the skills and experience to offer appropriate support. The option of dropping a subject was regularly offered to a number of pupils each year, often including those with Records of Need, but not limited to this group. The school had gained a high reputation in its area for achieving good pass rates with pupils with specific difficulties.

Alternative assessment strategies

The need to consider alternative assessment strategies is implicit in the remark made by one teacher, quoted above, that the existing system "constantly judged [pupils with specific difficulties] on a single criterion at which they were bound to fail, i.e. written performance". This school, like others, attempted to counter this discrimination by making use of dictaphones and cassette recorders to record pupils' work, and transcription and scribing services for the purposes of formal assessment, e.g. end of term or end of year examinations. In another school, a Mathematics teacher explained that they had allowed pupils to have extra time and a reader in assessments; in normal teaching, he "would be prepared to accept more oral answers" from them. Five of the case study schools also referred to the securing of dispensations for pupils with specific difficulties, i.e. the use of a reader and / or scribe in public examinations. One school pointed out the importance of pupils receiving practice in working under these conditions, and mentioned that the PTLS had acted as a scribe for one pupil in preliminary examinations.

Summary

Specific learning difficulties are seen by responding schools in terms of particular functional weaknesses in pupils who might otherwise be intellectually able. The psycho-medical aetiology, diagnosis and remediation of those weaknesses is less important for schools than their impact on the pupil's ability to function and learn within a common curriculum. Provision, therefore, draws on a wide range of strategies aimed at enabling the pupil to participate as fully as possible in the curriculum. There is a strong sense both that each pupil's needs are different and that a pragmatic response to supporting the pupil is more useful than a commitment to one

or other theoretical approach to specific learning difficulties. Accordingly, provision can be characterised as *eclectic, pragmatic, responsive and customised.*

It will be noted that relatively few of the particular forms of provision described above have been designed specifically for pupils with specific learning difficulties. Because of the curricular (as opposed to psycho-medical) perspective which schools adopt, they are able to bring to bear a wide range of strategies familiar from other aspects of Learning Support work. Although some 'tailor-made' strategies are in use in schools what is distinctive about schools' approaches is the way in which more-or-less standard Learning Support strategies are assembled into customised packages for particular pupils.

CHAPTER 3 : DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SCHOOLS

Thus far, we have reported all schools as though there were minimal differences between them. To a certain extent, this is true; as we commented in the previous chapter, in broad terms, schools were following a common approach in terms of conceptualisation of specific learning difficulties, rationales offered, and provision made. There were, however, some differences of emphasis between schools, which can be characterised in terms of:–

- *caseload of pupils with specific learning difficulties;*
- *specificity of approach;*
- *awareness of the parental context.*

Caseload of pupils with specific learning difficulties

Schools were asked to report the numbers of pupils on roll with specific learning difficulties and those with other forms of special need. Even though schools were selected for their commitment to specific learning difficulties provision, there is considerable variation not simply in the proportion of pupils identified as having specific learning difficulties, but also in the relationship between that and the percentage of pupils with other special needs. Some schools identify less than 1% of their pupils as having specific learning difficulties, whilst others identify nearly 6%. In some schools, the specific learning difficulties population outnumbers the rest of the special needs population; in others, the reverse is true. At one extreme around 1% of the population is regarded as having special needs of any kind; at the other over 20% are seen to have special needs (see appendix E for a full analysis of these responses).

These variations are evident despite the fact that this was not a national survey and that it sought to gather data only from nominated schools. It seems likely that the inclusion of schools in other contexts (inner-city schools, for instance) and of schools without particularly well-developed approaches to specific learning difficulties would have increased this variation significantly (evidence emerging from the survey of all schools in one English LEA would tend to confirm this hypothesis). Clearly, this raises questions about both the incidence of specific learning difficulties and the consistency in the criteria which schools use to identify such difficulties — questions which call for further investigation.

However, it also helps to illuminate some of the differences in emphasis which were evident in schools' approaches to specific learning difficulties. It seems to be the case that particular conjunctions of school size, proportions of pupils with specific learning difficulties and other forms of special need, together with absolute numbers of pupils with specific learning difficulties, create contexts which lead schools to approach provision somewhat differently. This point is perhaps best illustrated by reference to three case studies — which will also serve to put some flesh on the bones of the outline description of provision in the previous chapter.

Case study A

School		No. of pupils with Specific Learning Difficulties			No. of pupils with other forms of special need			Total No. of pupils with special needs
School no.	*Roll*	*Recorded*	*No record*	*Total*	*Recorded*	*No record*	*Total*	*Total*
1	<400*	0	22	22	2	6	8	30

** Only approximate figures are given in order to protect the anonymity of the school.*

This was a relatively small school with low levels of special need. Although the number of pupils identified as having specific difficulties by the Principal Teacher Learning Support was significant, none had a Record of Need, and their difficulties were, for the most part, rather mild. Few of them were currently receiving any direct tuition.

This school laid particular emphasis on a rationale of individual needs, the Principal Teacher Learning Support remarking:

> They're all dealt with on their individual merits.

Interviewees also spoke in favour of a pragmatic approach, being somewhat suspicious of theories, and believed in the value of small teaching groups as an element of provision:

> ... pupils [with specific learning difficulties] need one-to-one teaching, or very small groups. They can get lost in big classes.

Considerable emphasis was placed on the emotional well-being of pupils and great care was taken to ensure that pupils were happy with the interventions which were offered to them. The result was that provision tended to be made very much on a

case-by-case basis, with a strong element of trial and error in the approaches that were used.

Typical of this was the use of Edu-K (see appendix A). The PTLS had 'discovered' this approach somewhat serendipitously at an alternative therapies fair, and had been sufficiently impressed by it to have tried it out with some of her pupils. The results had been encouraging, though her opinion was that this might have as much to do with enhancement of the pupils' self-esteem as with any neurological or information-processing changes it might have brought about. Her attitude was that its theoretical basis was of secondary importance to its practical value. Moreover, whatever its benefits, it was not the sole answer to specific learning difficulties so much as "another tool".

Indeed, the use of Edu-K on a one-to-one basis was proving extremely time-consuming, and there was not enough learning Support staffing available to sustain it any longer. The PTLS, therefore, was reluctantly finding herself forced to abandon it, despite its apparent effectiveness. Pupils were now increasingly being left to "soldier on in the classroom", and the PTLS's view was that, overall,

> I don't know where we're going but there's a big melting pot that we're in.

Case study B

School		**No. of pupils with Specific Learning Difficulties**			**No. of pupils with other forms of special need**			**Total No. of pupils with special needs**
School no.	*Roll*	*Recorded*	*No record*	*Total*	*Recorded*	*No record*	*Total*	*Total*
17	>1000	6	12	18	8	3	11	29

This relatively large school had seen a recent, sudden influx of pupils with Records of Need for specific learning difficulties. Local circumstances had made staff highly aware of specific learning difficulties as an issue.

The rationale for provision in this school laid emphasis on the importance of making pupils as independent and autonomous as possible. An impressive range of strategies was in place. A notable feature of provision was the setting up of a special class in S1, containing all the pupils in that year group identified as having specific difficulties, including five with Records of Need. This was described as a

"modification of normal school policy". Two rationales were offered for this form of organisation:

1. it permitted a high level of support to be targeted towards these pupils;
2. it would allow expertise to build up among the teachers who dealt with this class.

One interviewee commented that it had also allowed the pupils, who had settled well at the school, to support each other.

A new reading scheme, *Reading for Sure*, was being piloted, and members of the Learning Support Department were gaining accreditation as qualified teachers of the scheme. The school's participation was part of a regional pilot of the scheme, which was still under evaluation at the time of the visit. However, teachers were pleased with the results so far, perceiving measurable progress in reading skills and confidence with several pupils, and seeing a "curriculum overlap", i.e. it enabled pupils to access materials in subject areas which they might otherwise have been unable to do. (See Appendix A for further details of *Reading for Sure*.)

Other forms of support available included: the latest information technology, taping of materials, differentiation, counselling, reading (to the pupils by a support teacher), and scribing. A picture emerges of a school where a menu of ready-made strategies was being developed, from which individual support programmes were devised. There is evidence that considerable time and energy had been, and continued to be, invested in developing expertise, employing trained staff, and searching for appropriate strategies and materials. However, staff were also concerned to point out that there many other demands on the time of Learning Support staff, and that there was a need to "balance one set of needs against another".

Case study C

School		**No. of pupils with Specific Learning Difficulties**			**No. of pupils with other forms of special need**			**Total No. of pupils with special needs**
School no.	*Roll*	*Recorded*	*No record*	*Total*	*Recorded*	*No record*	*Total*	*Total*
18	<800	3	21	24	8	24	32	56

There was a common perception among staff that this school had a strong reputation for providing for pupils with specific learning difficulties, which led to more such pupils being attracted. This perception was supported by an analysis carried out by

the Principal Teacher Learning Support of the pupils dealt with directly by her Department, which found that 50% of those with specific difficulties came from 'without the catchment'. Moreover, the school felt itself to be responding to relatively high levels of other forms of special need. As the PTLS put it in her questionnaire response:

> We have become a 'magnet' school for pupils with special educational needs generally.

Although a variety of forms of provision were in use, including taping materials, scribing, and information technology, there was agreement that the school made greater use of extraction and direct tuition than others, "because of the numbers of dyslexic pupils". A distinction was nonetheless drawn between the type of intervention most suited to pupils with specific difficulties, which placed an emphasis on the development of metacognitive skills, and that appropriate to children with other forms of special need, who may not understand the concepts presented in some areas of the curriculum, and therefore require more "lockstep" reinforcement methods. However, the increasing numbers of pupils with specific difficulties was a serious cause for concern to all staff interviewed at the school. The Principal Teacher was well aware of her colleagues' concerns about "skewing of the population", and herself felt that the Department was at "saturation point":

> I see us drowning unless something is done about the growing number of specific learning difficulties pupils.

The Rector felt that this situation was precluding the development of a consultancy role by Learning Support staff, and that it put extra strain and workload on class teachers because of the need for increased individualisation of teaching. The school faced an additional uncertainty, as it had been approached by the Region with a view to setting up a Dyslexia Unit in the near future. At the time of the visit, it was uncertain whether this policy would be implemented; staff felt that it was confirmation of the school's good reputation for specific difficulties, but were worried that it would add to the risk of attracting ever-larger numbers of pupils with difficulties.

The high level of need for support among pupils led this school to experience considerable tensions between allocating resources to pupils with specific learning difficulties and those with other forms of learning difficulty — "specific learning difficulties is *one* target group", as the Principal Teacher stressed. Although a range of strategies was available, it appeared that there was less scope for the school to

invest time and energy in exploring new, previously untried forms of provision than was possible for the school in case study B.

Some conclusions

Although it is important not to generalise too far from these case studies, it is nonetheless possible to see how the caseload of pupils with specific learning difficulties interacts with other factors to make certain emphases of approach more attractive and viable than others. Where the level of demand is relatively low in terms both of specific learning difficulties and other forms of special need (as in case study A), schools are able to respond on a case-by-case basis, and have some freedom to try out approaches and modify them as they go along. On the other hand, these approaches may never become fully formalised or embedded in the school, and may be vulnerable to changing demands and priorities.

As the caseload of pupils with specific learning difficulties expands (as in case study B), so approaches may become more formalised and extensive; more 'structural' strategies (special groups and purpose-designed schemes) may be viable, and time and energy may be available for the systematic development of provision. However, where this increase is accompanied by an equivalent increase in demands from other forms of special needs (as in case study C), the school's approach may come under pressure; the formalisation of its specific learning difficulties work may conflict with its other Learning Support work, and the sort of individualised strategies that characterise the former may come to seem increasingly non-viable.

Without a full evaluation of different schools' approaches, it is difficult to do more than draw attention to these differences. However, it may be worth underlining one or two messages which seem to come from the case studies :

1. There is no universal blueprint for specific learning difficulties provision. Schools may well work within a common broad approach, but they will inevitably interpret this approach in the light of their particular circumstances.
2. The presence of significant numbers of pupils with specific learning difficulties makes it possible for schools to develop more formalised and structural responses, particularly where other forms of special needs demand remain manageable.
3. There are some dangers at either end of the continuum of demand. Where demands from pupils with specific learning difficulties are low, schools may be tempted into a somewhat adhocratic approach or may not have the resources to develop very formalised approaches. Where overall levels of

demand are high, schools may be forced into a 'mere survival' mode. Both these extremes would seem to have implications at Regional level, where patterns of placement, provision and support are determined, and at school level where some form of strategic planning around these issues seems to be necessary.

4. Just as there is no blueprint for provision, so there is no school with a 'perfect solution'. Each of the schools described here — indeed, each school in the sample, had its problems — some of them quite acute. Although these schools have made promising and thoughtful starts to specific learning difficulties provision, there is clearly scope for considerable development.

Specificity of approach

The eclectic, pragmatic and customised nature of the approach common to all participating schools has been noted above (see chapter 2). Nonetheless, there were differences of emphasis between schools in how far they operated with a psycho-medical conceptualisation and in the extent to which their interventions were specific to pupils with specific difficulties.

Despite the overall tendency of schools to conceptualise specific learning difficulties from a curricular and pedagogical perspective, there were nonetheless some exceptions. One school, for instance, quoted the definition proposed by the Dyslexia Institute :

> [Specific Learning Difficulties] are defined as organising deficiencies which restrict the student's competencies in information processing, in motor skills and in working memory, so causing limitations in some or all of the skills of speech, reading, spelling, writing, essay writing, memory and behaviour.

Another school referred to its own in-house booklet, *Dyslexia —The Hidden Disability*, which contained the following definition:

> [Dyslexia] is a term which covers a wide range of learning disability — the dysfunction usually affects spelling, reading, writing, numeracy — and speech can be affected too. The problem seems to be in sequencing and the short term memory. It displays in just about as many ways as there are people affected ... Physical research has shown a distinct difference between the brains of dyslexics and non-dyslexics.

It will be apparent that these precise definitions are strongly influenced by psycho-medical perspectives, an influence which can also be detected in the quasi-medical

language of 'diagnosis' and 'treatment' of dyslexia used by one-fifth of schools in their questionnaire responses.

Similarly, some schools were aware of interventions explicitly designed for pupils with specific learning difficulties. Mention has already been made of two highly specific forms of intervention, *viz.* the remedial reading scheme *Reading for Sure*, and the therapeutic technique *Educational Kinesiology*, both targeted directly at pupils with 'dyslexia', and buttressed by their originators with a theoretical scaffolding which puts forward a neuro-psychological view of the 'condition'. In addition, two schools reported the use of overlays for Scatopic Sensitivity Syndrome.

More widespread evidence of the influence of psycho-medical conceptualisations was found in the fact that more than 60% of schools reported the involvement of the Educational Psychologist in an advisory role, and the same proportion reported the use of psychological assessment of pupils suspected of having specific learning difficulties. The involvement (where appropriate) of other external agencies, including the medical services, paediatrician, and speech therapy, was reported by one-fifth of schools.

By contrast with these specific conceptualisations and interventions, other schools tended to eschew precise definitions for fear of stigmatising pupils. Two-thirds of responding schools reported a concern to avoid labelling of pupils. This was commonly associated with a stress in provision on integration and a rationale of individual, as opposed to categorical, needs. One school cited a psycho-medical definition, but commented:

> The basic philosophy is to tackle individual needs as far as possible. Considering the children 'identified' ... they are all very different from each other. The unifying feature, if any, is that our definition of SpLDs is a useful umbrella with which to cover them.

Another school explained that, in its Handbook on learning difficulties,

> The term "specific" has [been] replaced by "particular" to avoid the use of (to parents, etc.) meaningless jargon.

These schools placed a positive stress on a common policy for meeting all forms of special need or learning difficulty, seeing this as part of their concern to promote integration. One school felt that the question of the relationship between provision for specific difficulties and for other forms of special need was a red herring:

> There has always been an integrated policy on learning difficulty in all its manifestations. Therefore, there has never been any need to see it in terms of one type of 'Special Need' affecting any other.

These schools tended to use extraction 'as a last resort only', and stressed a broad, whole school responsibility for supporting pupils with specific and other learning difficulties, e.g.:

> If withdrawal is considered necessary — the purposes and timescale should be defined. A review should re-assess the situation. ... School Policy – Appropriate Education – sets the context for meeting pupil needs. This positive approach facilitates individual cases to be addressed in a supportive way.

There were, then, discernible contrasts between schools in the extent to which their conceptualisations were influenced by psycho-medical definitions, and in the specificity of their approach to provision for specific learning difficulties. A caveat, therefore, needs to be entered against our earlier contention the schools were following a broadly similar approach. However, that contention is by no means entirely invalid. Nowhere were differences so marked as to permit distinct, qualitatively different forms of approach to be identified. Where schools were working to psycho-medical definitions and undertaking highly specific interventions, these were always within the context of a broad range of strategies and a shared concern that pupils should have the fullest access to the mainstream classroom and curriculum. Psycho-medical definitions seemed, therefore, to be a means of ensuring that the particular characteristics of pupils with specific learning difficulties would not be overlooked, rather than the basis for a clinical approach; and targeted interventions were simply one tool amongst many that schools were using, rather than the sole or main strategy for responding to pupils' needs.

Awareness of the 'parental context'

Specific learning difficulties is a field which is characterised both by high levels of parental involvement and, in a few instances, by some degree of conflict between parents, voluntary associations and the education system (Riddell *et al* 1994). There appeared to be some variation between schools in the extent to which they were aware of and responded to these factors.

For most schools, parental involvement was entirely positive, and the need to be aware of potential conflict with parents was minimal. On the contrary, these schools

pursued a policy of involving the parents of children with specific learning difficulties in much the same way as they did all other parents of children with special needs. As one school put it,

> Fullest parental involvement [is] encouraged as a central principle.

80% of schools listed various forms of contact with parents in their response to the questionnaire, but in most cases, they declared that there was "no difference" from contact with other parents, or that contact was "broadly the same". Thus, typical forms of contact included: reviews of cases of pupils with Records of Need; contact with parents before the child arrives at secondary school; Parents' Evenings; and individual contact as necessary in cases of concern over a pupil. One-third of schools described arrangements which involved parents in making a contribution to children's learning, such as the school which involved parents in paired reading and spelling schemes, and explained:

> Tapes are sent home and parents contribute to this "opening up" of the curriculum.

This picture of generally positive relations was not disturbed, even when parents had sought advice and support from outside the school. Three schools reported individual cases where parents had had their child independently assessed either by a psychologist or through the local Dyslexia Institute. There was, however, no evidence of any breakdown in relationships with the parents in these cases. For the majority of schools, contact with voluntary associations such as the Dyslexia Association was simply not an issue. Links with the local branch of the Association were mentioned by only two schools. Where such groups were active, it did not necessarily follow that their activities had impinged greatly on the school's work. One PTLS, disapproving of the Association's supposed strategy of pressing for more resources to be spent on their pupils at the expense of others, had deliberately avoided contact. Another school commented:

> Some parents are members of local Dyslexia Association, but this has little bearing on home / school links.

There was some evidence, however, of schools which felt that relations with parents of pupils with specific learning difficulties demanded more targeted approaches. These schools reported that, although all parents were regarded as 'partners', their relationship with parents of pupils with specific learning difficulties had its own distinctive characteristics. These would commonly take the form of greater contact

and a closer working relationship. In other words, parents would be kept very closely informed about their child's progress, would be consulted on all major decisions regarding provision, would be invited to work with their child at home and would be offered materials and training to carry out that work successfully.

In some cases, schools felt the need to provide additional support and reassurance to such parents. Two case study schools, which had enjoyed good relationships with parents, viewed them nonetheless as "usually more anxious" than other parents, often wanting to know how they could help. Another commented:

> Parents of pupils with specific learning difficulties are encouraged to see LSS as a support service for them also.

In some cases, this supposed anxiety was seen as imposing particular demands on the school. Indeed, one fifth of responding schools saw parental pressures as a threat to their established forms of special needs provision (see Chart 5 in Chapter 4 below). One case study school, for instance, felt that parents were making unrealistic demands on the school :

> All the parents expected their children to be taught by teachers qualified to teach dyslexics — an impossibility.

In other schools, the main concern was with the high expectations parents might have of their children, and the stress that this might place on the pupils. One school had responded by inviting the parents of certain children to the school to discuss ways in which they could support their child's learning without putting them under undue pressure.

This heightened sensitivity to the needs and demands of parents is encapsulated in by the experience of one school in particular (school B in the cae studies cited above). This school was located in a Region where parents had recently undertaken litigation in a successful attempt to secure a place at a private school for their child. It was evident that this case had been instrumental in making the school more aware of the context of parental wishes and rights within which it was operating, and of its own wider accountability. It had responded positively by developing a wide range of strategies for intervention targeted at pupils with specific learning difficulties, some features of which have been described above; by pursuing contacts with the Dyslexia Association; and by pro-actively maintaining and developing relationships with parents (which, it stressed, were in general very good). However, a perceived shift in policy by the Region towards greater recording of pupils for 'dyslexia' was giving

rise to concern at the school, which had recently seen a dramatic increase in the number of pupils with such records attending the school. There was concern that this increase placed an extra stress on all teaching staff; that the increased workload might interfere with the Learning Support Department's work in other fields, such as links with primary schools; and that there was a need to 'balance one set of needs against another', to ensure that the needs of other pupils for support (e.g. the physically disabled) were not overlooked.

There does, then, seem to be a continuum of responses to the changing parental context. At one end of that continuum, relationships with parents are often both close and productive, but are seen by the school as relatively unproblematic and as being similar to relationships with other parents. In other schools, relationships remain unproblematic, but there is an awareness that parents of pupils with specific learning difficulties have particular needs and make particular demands. Beyond this, there are schools in which these demands are seen to create a potential for conflict, and where the school has had to take measures to respond to this danger.

Given both the anecdotal and the research evidence on the impact of parental pressure on schools, it is important to stress that relations with parents were positive in the majority of schools surveyed and that, where potential conflict was an issue, schools were taking steps that were positive and productive. In particular, they were developing provision not simply of high quality, but of *demonstrably* high quality. Given the current moves towards respecting parental rights and wishes throughout the education system, it may be that all schools will wish to put themselves in a position where the quality of their work can be made apparent not just to themselves but to those to whom they are accountable. We shall return to this issue in chapter 5.

Summary

Although all schools responding to the project were adopting a broadly similar approach to specific learning difficulties provision, there were differences in emphasis between schools. These depended partly on the caseload of pupils with specific learning difficulties in relation to the size of the school and its overall special needs population. There was some tendency for 'low demand' schools to have less formalised approaches, and some pressures and dilemmas in schools with high overall levels of demand. Similarly, some schools adopted approaches that were more *specifically* targeted at specific learning difficulties than others. Finally, schools differed in their sensitivity to the potential for conflict between parents and the

education system. None of these differences in emphasis, however, made it possible to discern *markedly* different approaches in these schools.

CHAPTER 4 : SPECIFIC LEARNING DIFFICULTIES AND THE WHOLE SCHOOL APPROACH

One of the issues which this research sought to address was the extent to which provision for pupils with specific learning difficulties is compatible with a form of Learning Support — the 'whole school approach' — which was arguably developed to meet the needs of a somewhat different group of pupils (see chapter 1). Accordingly, schools were asked both in the questionnaire and in the case-study visits, to respond to this issue directly.

Schools' views on specific learning difficulties and the whole school approach

Schools tended to respond in two ways. On the one hand, many were keen to point out that their provision for pupils with specific learning difficulties formed an integral part of an overall approach to Learning Support :

> It is not distinct from other provision
>
> Generally it doesn't [differ], since the overall principle is to provide what the individual pupil requires to gain access to appropriate curriculum.
>
> The needs of *all* our pupils are identified and met to the best of our abilities whether the pupils display special needs or specific learning difficulties.

On the other hand, the emphasis which is evident here on meeting the needs of *individuals* led to a difference in practice if not in principle. This was acknowledged by some schools :

> Children with specific learning difficulties are given access to the *full* curriculum. Other special needs children (MLD) may follow a more restricted curriculum, i.e. simplified materials emphasising *main* teaching points.
>
> For pupils with moderate learning difficulties/general learning difficulties, reduced and/or adapted curriculum may be negotiated to allow for performance at lower intellectual level, or slower pace...Pupils with general learning difficulties would not necessarily use dictaphones for response, especially if no significant improvement over written response was evident.
>
> The roles, strategies and provision are similar, but the balance of these may differ, e.g.. pupils with general learning difficulties tend to require a more restricted timetable, more time in the LSS base and more non-standardised teaching material (i.e. not mainstream materials).

These differences would appear to lie along three dimensions :

- *Curriculum participation*. Because pupils with specific learning difficulties are regarded as intellectually able, there is an expectation that they will participate more fully in the mainstream curriculum than pupils with more general learning difficulties. Although, as we have see earlier, the curriculum burden may be reduced to some extent and withdrawal is a major strategy in some schools, these are seen as strategies for maximising participation in the curriculum as a whole, rather as part of an overall strategy of curriculum adaptation.
- *Differentiation*. The notion of differentiation is important in schools' provision for pupils with specific learning difficulties, but has a slightly different meaning from the one it has in respect of pupils with general learning difficulties. This is perhaps best expressed by the correction made by one PTLS when the research team suggested that differentiation might be less important for pupils with specific learning difficulties :

  > Whilst understanding your reason for saying that there is a reduced reliance on differentiation of curriculum content, there is still differentiation of pace, methodology, instructions, resources, etc. Differentiation in the form of matching the curriculum to the pupil's individual needs still is the key in my estimation.

  The key distinction, then is between differentiation of curriculum *content* (which is not appropriate for pupils with specific learning difficulties) and differentiation of curriculum *delivery* (which most certainly is).
- *'Tighter' provision.* This phrase is borrowed from one school's response to the question of how specific learning difficulties provision had impacted on overall special needs provision :

  > Provision is 'tighter' — more carefully defined

  The whole school approach has traditionally been individualised in the sense that it has sought to meet individual needs. However, it is arguable that the strategies used to that end are broadly the same for all the pupils it encompasses. In schools' provision for specific learning difficulties, however, there is a very real sense that strategies have to be very carefully targeted on individuals' particular areas of strength and weakness. A broad brushstrokes approach of differentiation or in-class support — which may be entirely appropriate where global difficulties can be assumed — would be ineffective and wasteful of resources where the difficulties are so specific.

The same message is apparent in the responses schools made to the question of how provision for specific learning difficulties had impacted on the roles of the Learning

Support teacher. The role as it has emerged since the 1978 progress report was not challenged by schools, and some averred that they simply adhered to an unmodified model :

> The Learning Support Service bases its provision on the five roles of Learning Support as given in national guidelines. Therefore it uses all the methods included in these guidelines to meet the needs of all pupils with special educational needs.

Other schools, however, pointed to subtle variations on this common theme :

> The same principles apply — consultation, co-operative teaching, direct tuition etc. — but there is less intensive one-to-one tuition [for pupils with general learning difficulties]

Or again

> There is a Learning Support Service handbook which details strategies and practice outlined by the Region and the LSS notes of direct tuition, co-operative teaching, consultation and special services are utilised, in different 'balance' to fulfil the needs of pupils with specific / general difficulties, sensory impairments, etc.

The precise nature of this shift in balance varied from school to school — and, indeed, from pupil to pupil. However, it does lead to an interesting characterisation of the relationship between specific learning difficulties and the whole school approach. It would appear that the whole school approach — as manifested in the Learning Support work undertaken in all schools and in the roles of Learning Support teachers evolved since 1978 — is widely accepted as an appropriate model of provision for pupils with specific learning difficulties. The potential conflicts, between an approach devised with pupils with general learning difficulties in mind and the particular needs of pupils with specific learning difficulties, are not ones which schools experience as sufficient reasons for abandoning that approach. However, neither is that approach regarded as a blueprint which simply has to be implemented in all cases. Rather, it is seen as a menu of strategies and actions from which schools select at particular times to meet the needs of particular pupils. The 'whole school approach' as it applies to pupils with specific learning difficulties is thus somewhat different from the 'whole school approach' as it applies to pupils with other forms of special need.

It is perhaps appropriate to conclude with the comments of one PTLS who drew most effectively on her considerable experience to give us a salutary reminder :

> I have been in the job for so long that I have seen cyclical changes from withdrawal groups to 'in-class support' back to pressure to withdraw

> individuals for specific skills support. A judicious balance of all these aspects in response to need is the line we have tried to take. From the extremes of 'consultancy' when only the method and materials seemed to matter we seem to be moving back to the position where the needs of the individual child have to be taken into account. I welcome this...

Opportunities

In order to explore further the impact of provision for pupils with specific learning difficulties on the wider special needs work of the school, both the questionnaire and case study interviews invited respondents to indicate the opportunities and threats which they felt were presented by the former. An analysis of the responses regarding opportunities is presented as Chart 4.

The opportunity which was most commonly identified by schools (mentioned in nearly two-thirds of responses) was the development of the role of Learning Support staff. One respondent, in a school with a relatively high number of pupils with specific difficulties, explained how, "Consultation has opened up because staff have come to ask for help". A senior manager in a case study school, which had recently experienced a large rise in the number of pupils with Records of Need for specific difficulties, commented that one of the positive aspects was that, "more staff are working as a team", referring to increased collaboration between Learning Support and subject teachers.

A second benefit identified by many schools was the possibility of generalising strategies devised for pupils with specific difficulties to other groups of pupils. An example of this was described in Chapter 2, where Learning Support staff had recorded vocabulary on to tape for dyslexic pupils; the Modern Languages Department had taken up this idea with enthusiasm, and was looking to extend its use to all pupils. A PTLS in another case study school summarised this outlook succinctly, saying: "Support could be devised for pupils with specific learning difficulties, but the benefits can be realised for all". In a third school, staff similarly felt that the particular response it had adopted — the setting up of a reduced size class containing all the pupils with Records of Need — was of benefit to all the pupils concerned. As one teacher put it:

> Each child gets more attention and a more personalised course because of the smaller class size.

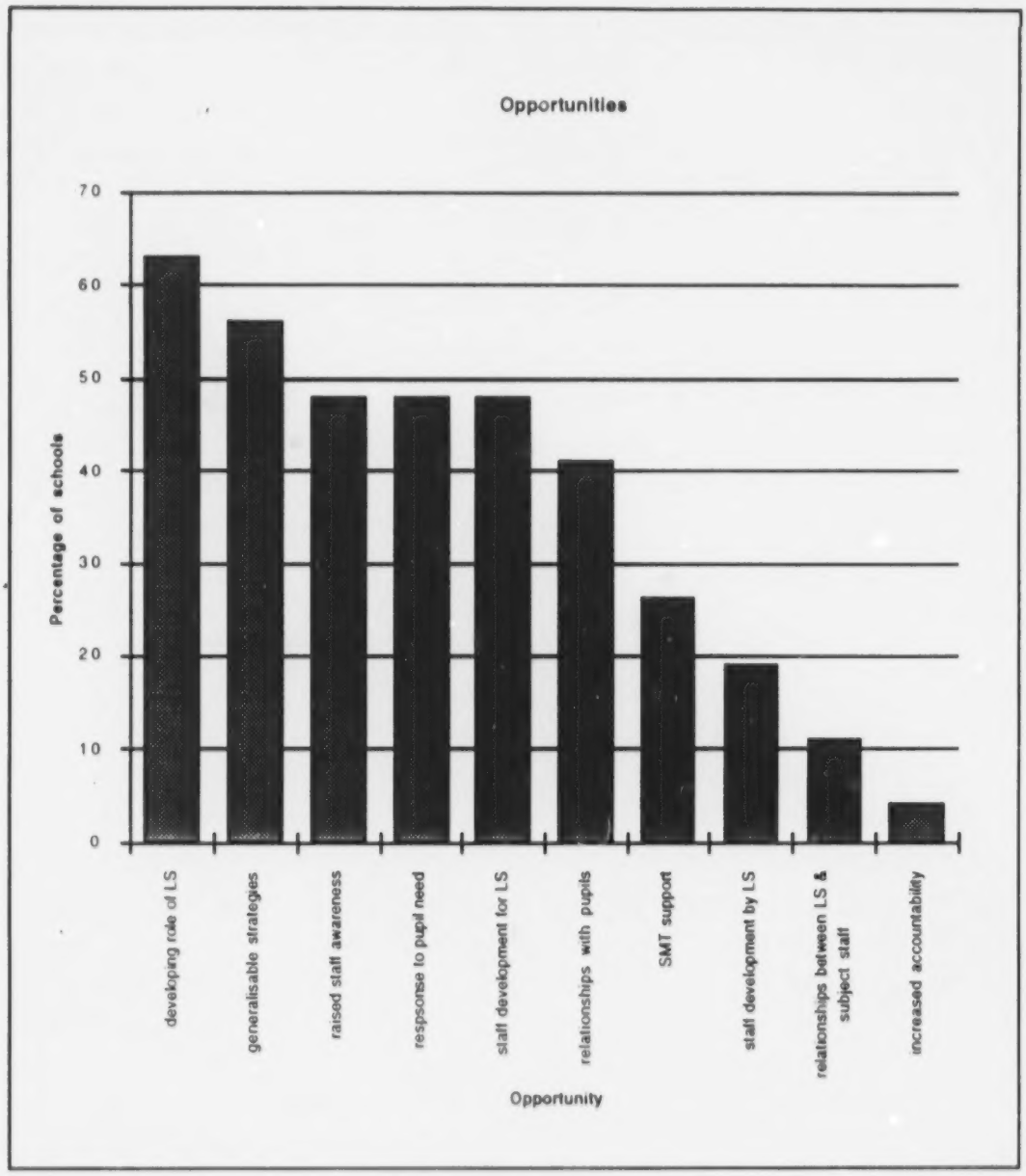

Chart 4

The third most significant benefit, noted by half of the responding schools, was the raising of staff awareness, both about specific learning difficulties in particular, and about other forms of special need. One questionnaire response explained:

> We have been fortunate in having one very able pupil with an obvious specific learning difficulty. This has greatly helped to 'sell' the concept of SLD to staff who might otherwise have been reluctant to accept its validity.

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A PTLS in one case study school believed that subject colleagues had gained a greater awareness of the possible learning difficulties encountered by many pupils from working with one pupil with identified specific difficulties. A subject teacher in the same school echoed this view, explaining how she felt that working with this pupil, who was able but experienced considerable difficulties in mathematics, had "improved the way I teach". Whereas in the past she might have tended to teach to "the middle band" in a class, responding to this pupil's difficulties had caused her to review her presentation of topics such that, she felt, she was now better at reaching "the ones at the top and bottom end" as well.

Threats

Schools were also asked about the threats to their overall special needs provision which they perceived in specific learning difficulties. By far the greatest concern was the lack of sufficient resources, especially staffing, to be able to offer the level of support they would wish alongside all the other demands they had to meet. Because of this, "hard decisions have to be made", as a PTLS in one case study school put it; "there is a need to prioritise". In particular, some of the strategies commonly used to support pupils with specific difficulties were by their nature resource-intensive (direct tuition, scribing and transcription services, one-to-one help with reading, for instance). Learning Support staff in a number of case study schools stressed that pupils with specific difficulties were one among several constituencies requiring support. As one PTLS put it, "It's balancing one set of needs against another"; another remarked:

> We are short-staffed. There is a PH boy, for instance: there are many other demands.

These issues were, of course, particularly acute in the school cited earlier as 'case study C' (see Chapter3).

A further major concern in this as in other schools was uncertainty about the impact of future national and Regional policy. Staff at three case study schools mentioned Devolved Management of Resources as a source of uncertainty about the future. One said, "there is uncertainty about how the school will be resourced in the future for special needs"; another that the "ramifications of devolved management may create difficult dilemmas in the school", particularly with regard to maintaining staffing levels.

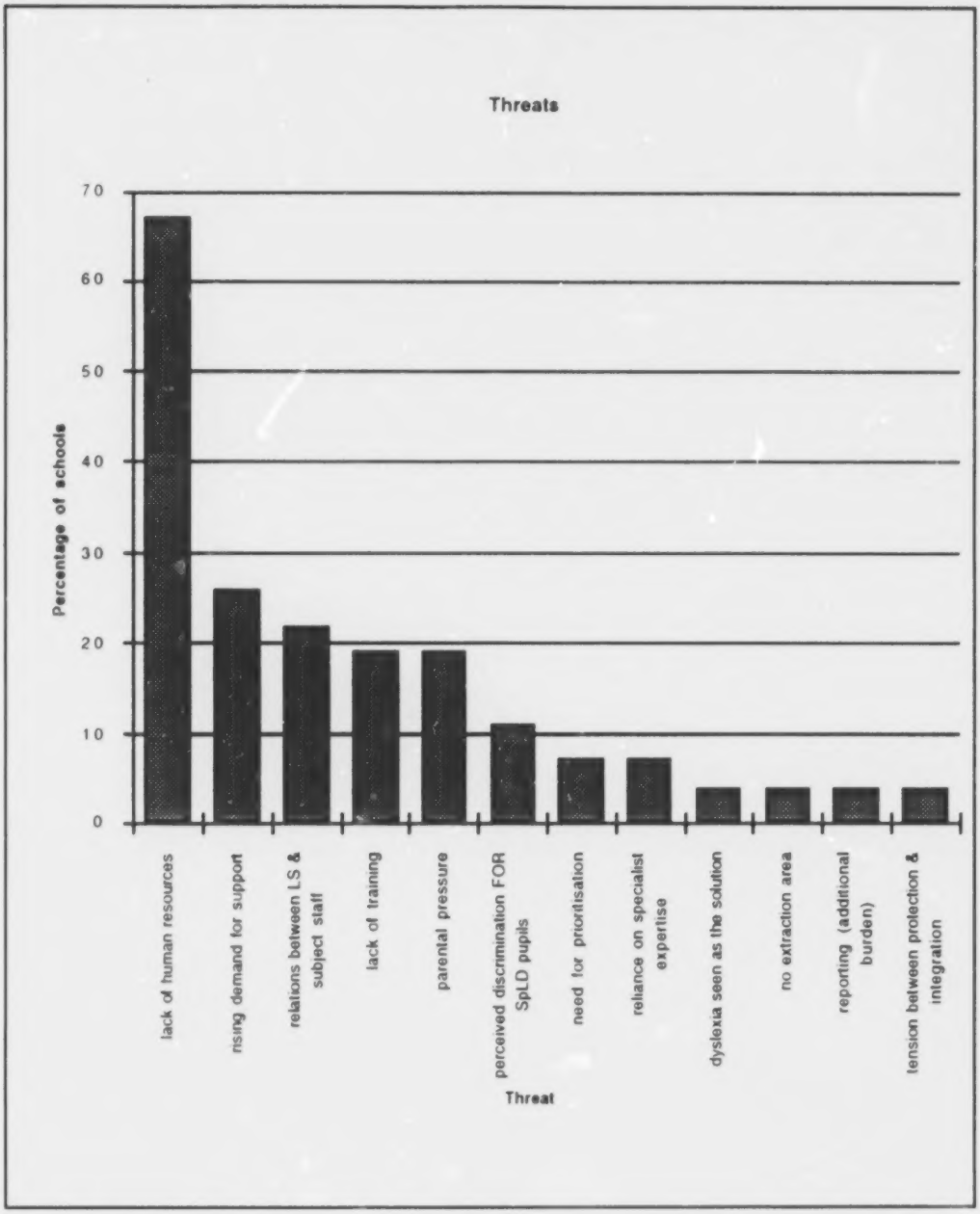

Chart 5

In two Regions, an additional source of uncertainty was the prospect of the creation of Dyslexia Units at selected schools in the Region. One school had recently invested considerable energy and resources in developing a range of responses to specific learning difficulties; however, it was not expected to be the site of a unit should these be established, leaving open the question of how useful its investment would prove in the long term. Another school had been approached about being a site for a unit in the near future; there was a concern that this would attract even larger numbers of

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pupils with learning difficulties to a school which already felt its intake to be skewed in this direction:

> My concern about a dyslexic unit is that we're it for [the city]. If you get a growing number of pupils with serious difficulties, there will be a more serious knock on effect.

Relations with parents

As we indicated in the previous chapter, one of the threats reported by just under a fifth of responding schools was parental pressure. There has, since the Warnock Report (DES, 1978) been an emphasis within special education of all kinds on the notion of 'parents as partners', and a number of writers have emphasised the key role to be played by parents within the whole school approach (Dessent, 1987; Wolfendale, 1989). At the same time, we have already see how research undertaken by the Stirling group (Riddell, *et al.*, 1994; Riddell, *et al.*, 1992) has indicated the different perceptions of specific learning difficulties that teachers and parents might hold, and the potential for open conflict between parents and the education system. This raises the question as to how far the approach to parental involvement developed under the whole school approach is transferable to the parents of pupils with specific learning difficulties.

Our discussion of this issue in Chapter 3 would seem to lead to the following conclusion. For most schools the notion of 'parents as partners' applies quite as much to parents of children with specific learning difficulties as to all other parents. There may well be particular responses to the particular perceived needs of such parents, but these are not seen as out of line with schools' overall approach to parental involvement. However, the 'parents as partners' model can come under strain where the particular demands made by parents of children with specific learning difficulties are seen by schools as being ones which they cannot meet, or which threaten the integrity of their other work.

In other words, the issue of parental involvement parallels all other aspects of the relationship between specific learning difficulties provision and the whole school approach. For the most part, schools see no conflict between the two, though established approaches are often targeted and modified so that they meet the particular needs of children with specific learning difficulties and their parents. However, this targeting may be resource-intensive, and where schools' resources are limited and the level of demand is high, this can lead to significant stresses. It is

perhaps worth adding, however, that, as Chapter 3 makes clear, the effect of such stresses may be to provoke a review of practice and provision, and thus may not be entirely negative.

Summary

There are some *prima facie* grounds for believing that there might be conflict between the whole school approach as evidenced in schools' Learning Support work, and the demands made by pupils with specific learning difficulties. In fact, schools find the whole school approach, including the notions of the Learning Support teacher's roles and of 'parents as partners', a useful model on which to base their specific learning difficulties provision. However, that model is treated as a menu rather than a blueprint; that is, schools select particular aspects of the approach and balance them differently for different groups of pupils, or, indeed, for individuals. The 'whole school approach' as it applies to pupils with specific learning difficulties thus tends to be characterised by support for curriculum participation, carefully-targeted provision and intensive parental involvement.

This particular balance has created opportunities within schools for generalising targeted approaches to wider groups of pupils, and for raising the awareness and willingness to collaborate of mainstream staff. However, it is also a very demanding and resource-intensive variant of the whole school approach, and some schools are concerned about their continued ability to meet those demands effectively.

CHAPTER 5 : ISSUES, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Up to this point, we have been content to report the findings of our research as fully and as objectively as possible. However, schools and policy-makers face urgent demands in the field of specific learning difficulties and seek whatever support they can find to help them meet those demands. Accordingly, we now wish to turn, in a somewhat more speculative manner, to what we believe the implications of our findings to be for teachers and others involved in this field.

Is there a model of specific learning difficulties provision?

The starting point for this investigation was our concern that the rapid increase in activity in the field of specific learning difficulties had not been accompanied by any significant research or guidance on how provision might best be made in mainstream schools. It is important to ask the question, therefore, as to whether our work has uncovered a model of provision which schools generally can adopt.

Our answer to this is cautious but positive. We are hesitant about claiming the discovery of a 'new model' for three reasons :

1. Schools themselves were not talking in terms of models. Although many of them were able to give an account of sophisticated and complex forms of provision, they tended to see these as more or less immediate responses to the needs of individuals. They were not presented as the outcome of a thinking through of provision from first principles.
2. Much if not all of what schools reported was familiar from existing work in the field of special needs. Schools' approaches to specific learning difficulties were thus variants of existing whole school approaches.
3. Although there were broad similarities between schools' approaches, there was also some variance depending on context and predilection. Specific learning difficulties provision did not look quite the same in any two schools; indeed, some schools would argue that it did not look precisely the same for any two pupils.

Despite these caveats, however, we were struck forcibly by two features of schools' work. First, there was considerable similarity, if not identity, between provision in different schools; we certainly could not identify radically *different* approaches in schools. Second, there was considerable coherence in what schools were doing, in the sense that provision was informed by convincing rationales, which were themselves

informed by a clear conceptualisation of specific learning difficulties. We contend, therefore, that although schools' provision was not consciously based on a model, and although there is no blueprint which can be applied to all schools, it is nonetheless possible to *extrapolate* from the particular cases reported here to a model which schools can use to clarify and develop their own approaches.

That model is presented as Figure 1. At its centre is a two-part *conceptualisation* of specific learning difficulties. On the one hand, there are certain *principles* which are held to apply to all pupils, including those with specific learning difficulties. They are the principle of maximum participation in a common curriculum, leading to maximum achievement and realisation of potential and, in the longer term to maximum participation in wider 'life opportunities' (career, lifelong learning, social acceptance and so on). The particular learning characteristics of certain children — whether their origins are neurological, social, educational or whatever — only become significant when they result in functional difficulties which prevent the pupils realising the principles of participation and achievement. In this sense, they constitute a *problem* for the pupil and her/his teachers.

This conceptualisation informs the *rationale* of provision. Ensuring participation despite the problem of functional difficulties demands four approaches :

- a frontal assault on those difficulties to bring about, particularly, an improvement in basic skills
- differentiation of curriculum delivery (as opposed to content) and context (e.g. through in-class support) so that the curriculum and classroom become more accessible to the pupil
- building learner autonomy, so that the pupil finds his/her own ways of coping with and circumventing his/her difficulties
- building self-esteem, so that the pupil values her/his achievements and perseveres in learning, rather than viewing her/himself solely through the lens of functional difficulties.

These four aims are not, of course, entirely independent of each other, nor are of they of equal importance for each pupil.

Finally, this rationale informs the provision that is made. That provision will not be the same from school to school, nor, indeed, from pupil to pupil. Instead, a menu of strategies will be used to put together a customised 'package' for each pupil. The particular strategies which comprise this menu are not, in themselves, necessarily new or beyond the scope of most teachers. In the words of one of our respondents, "Good dyslexia teaching is just good class teaching !".

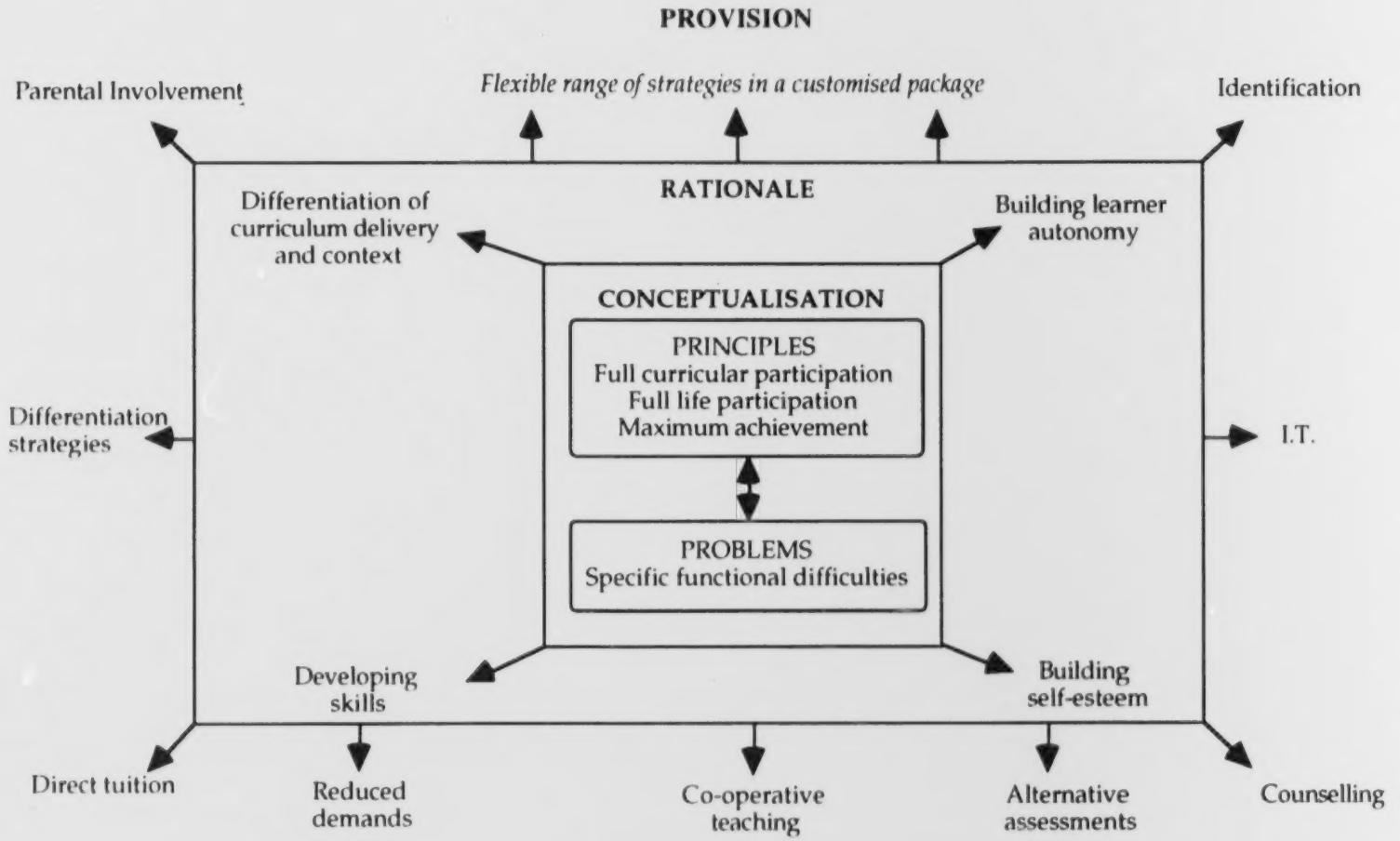

Figure 1: A possible model of an approach to specific learning difficulties provision

However, they may well include some of the approaches developed out of the extensive psycho-medical research in this field, and they will certainly be characterised by a precise targeting towards the needs of particular pupils.

We suggest that this model might be useful for three important purposes :

- *Review and development.* By matching their current provision against this model, schools can review the extent to which they are achieving a coherent and comprehensive approach to specific learning difficulties. In particular, they can review whether they have an adequate range of strategies, and whether the balance between those strategies is appropriate both overall and in individual cases. This might be particularly important given the danger of adhocery which is inherent in the case-by-case approach favoured by some schools.
- *Accountability.* Schools are increasingly required to give an account both of their aims and of their effectiveness to a wide range of stakeholders. This model may allow them to explain themselves more fully, and to begin to develop appropriate performance indicators which would demonstrate their effectiveness. We would suggest that such accountability is particularly important in working with parents of pupils with specific learning difficulties. The understandable anxieties of parents are likely to be much allayed if schools can demonstrate clearly how they are seeking to meet the needs of their children.
- *Debate and inquiry.* Given the conflicted and (in some respects) under-researched nature of this field, it is important that debate and inquiry move forward on a sound footing. The model proposed is certainly not the *only* model of specific learning difficulties provision, and may not be the *best.* Nonetheless, it is, we suggest, a clearly-articulated model; other models can be defined in relation to it, and their relative merits and demerits assessed. Given the dominance of the psycho-medical perspective in this field, it is not surprising that psycho-medical models of specific learning difficulties have tended to be the most fully developed. This has left schools and teachers wallowing somewhat in a psycho-medical wake. The model proposed here, however, allows educationalists to engage in debate with others on a more equal footing and to argue for their distinctive approach. It also allows research to proceed to investigate this model further and to search for both refinements and alternatives.

Impending issues

Although the message of this research is largely positive, it has raised certain issues which will require to be resolved — and sooner rather than later. Principal amongst

these is the growing pressure some schools feel themselves to be under in sustaining their current approaches to specific learning difficulties.

This appears to have two aspects. First, the approach adopted by schools is both individualised and resource-intensive. It works very well where levels of demand are low and/or levels of resourcing are high. However, a case-by-case approach aiming at the development of customised packages of support for individuals, often including large measures of 1 : 1 tuition, is not viable as the volume of demand increases.

The second aspect is precisely that the volume of demand does appear to be increasing in certain quarters. This may be partly due to increased parental awareness and the current emphasis on the priority of parental rights in education. However, it is also due to increased awareness in schools which leads to the identification of ever-increasing numbers of pupils with specific learning difficulties.

The problem is exacerbated by a major shortcoming of research in the field to date. Despite the enormous efforts expanded on investigating the aetiology and diagnosis of specific learning difficulties, we still appear to have no consensual definition of those difficulties and no agreed criteria for determining when those difficulties call for special intervention and additional resources.

Our findings, whilst not addressing these problems directly, do, we would suggest, offer a way forward. If specific learning difficulties are conceptualised not in terms of psycho-medical dysfunctions, but in terms of difficulties which reduce effective participation in the curriculum, then we have a working definition which yields criteria for intervention. What becomes significant is not whether a particular pupil 'has' a disputed 'condition', but whether s/he is able to participate fully in the mainstream curriculum. This, we would suggest, though not without its difficulties, is an altogether more observable and less contentious conceptualisation of specific learning difficulties.

Moreover, if the problem is non-participation in the curriculum, then the solution is to maximise participation. Interventions and resources are called for *insofar as they are necessary in order to maximise participation*. In some cases, extremely resource-intensive interventions will indeed be necessary. In others, however, the wide range of strategies we have outlined and the principle of selecting from these as from a menu, are likely to mean that participation can be ensured through routine strategies that are relatively non-resource-intensive. Differentiation of curriculum delivery and parental involvement are good examples of such strategies.

A number of consequences flow from this re-conceptualisation of specific learning difficulties. First, schools will need to have available *assessment strategies* which allow them to determine the extent to which a particular pupil is or is not able to participate in and learn from the curriculum. Such strategies — like those reported by responding schools — are likely to be multi-faceted, but will focus on the pupil-in-the-classroom; that is, they will be assessments of how the pupil actually functions and learns in real classroom situations and will therefore also comprise an assessment of the appropriateness of current classroom practices. It is entirely within the professional expertise of teachers to conduct such assessments, although, of course, they may subsequently wish to supplement these with more psychometric and diagnostic assessments conducted by other professionals such as educational psychologists.

Second, since these assessments will be curriculum- and classroom- focused, schools will need to have available an appropriate range of *responses*. For the reasons of resource-pressure and mushrooming identification outlined above, these responses will need to be *staged*; i.e. schools will need to be able to set out how they can respond to specific learning difficulties at a series of discrete levels — for instance :

- at classroom level (i.e. through the work of class teachers and the differentiation of the curriculum)
- through customised interventions, using the range of strategies detailed throughout this report but drawing on the school's own resources
- through specialist-supported interventions, drawing on resources from beyond the school.

By clarifying the strategies available to them, schools can avoid ahocery and ensure that each pupil receives the most appropriate response; and by viewing their responses in terms of levels or stages, schools can ensure that they exhaust the possibilities of intervention at the lowest and most resource-efficient stages before proceeding to more costly (and perhaps less appropriate) interventions.

This leads into a further issue, which was raised by a number of responding schools : that is the issue of special unit or specially-resourced school provision as opposed to neighbourhood school provision for pupils with specific learning difficulties. Respondents reported that certain Regional authorities were considering the establishment of specialist provision in secondary schools in much the same way as one LEA in the English sample had done (see appendix B). The advantages of such provision might be argued to be twofold :

- it creates in some schools a 'critical mass' of pupils with specific learning difficulties which allows the schools to develop sophisticated and well-resourced

interventions and which raises the level of awareness of the staff as a whole above that which might otherwise be expected;

- it allows the Regional authority to demonstrate to concerned parents and to the voluntary associations which may represent them that specialist provision is available in ordinary schools; it thus helps to avoid conflict between parents and authorities and may avert the need for more costly placements (which inevitably divert resources from other pupils and other needs).

On the other hand, such specialist provision might be open to the criticisms of segregating and labelling pupils unnecessarily, of diminishing the resources and responses available to pupils who are *not* selected to benefit from it, and of being itself more costly than is necessary.

Our small-scale research does not permit a definitive resolution of this issue, but it does offer some important information which Regional authorities may wish to consider in determining their policy :

- Schools which contain relatively high numbers of pupils with specific learning difficulties do indeed seem to be able to formulate sophisticated and well-resourced responses to specific learning difficulties.
- Unit provision is one means of creating this 'critical mass' of pupils, but the experience of some English schools (see appendix B) suggests that some schools can ultimately find segregated units an unsatisfactory solution.
- Although a number of Scottish schools studied by our research had relatively high numbers of pupils with specific learning difficulties, none of them were the site of special units or specially-resourced provision. The numbers of pupils for whom they were making provision depended in part on local circumstances (catchment, schools size, prominence of specific learning difficulties as an issue), but also to a significant degree on the level of awareness within the school. Establishing a critical mass of pupils with specific learning difficulties might depend less on placing such pupils in the school as a matter of policy than on developing the ability and willingness of the school to recognise the needs of the pupils who are already on roll.
- A number of schools had begun to develop responses to specific learning difficulties despite the fact that they were small schools containing relatively low numbers of such pupils. There were, as we have suggested, differences between the way such schools operated and the way larger schools responded to specific learning difficulties. Nonetheless, there is no reason *in principle* why small schools should not develop appropriate responses. Needless to say, they will require particular patterns of support from Regional authorities in order to sustain

those responses, and this may become an issue of growing importance with the devolution of resource management to schools.

Our tentative response to the issue of unit provision, therefore, is to suggest that there might be alternative ways of achieving some of the claimed benefits of such provision. In particular, an increased awareness of the needs of pupils with specific learning difficulties within schools, and a development of appropriate responses as outlined above, seem capable of at least reducing the need for unit provision. Whether the need for special segregated provision can be entirely eliminated, or whether (and in what ways) 'neighbourhood school' provision is effective in meeting all the needs of pupils are, of course, questions which will have to await further research.

Specific learning difficulties and the whole school approach

The issues which were raised in chapter 4 regarding the relationship between specific learning difficulties provision and the whole school approach give rise to some wider considerations. The articulation of a particular 'approach' to provision for special needs in ordinary schools, and particularly the very clear definition of Learning Support roles which has been available to schools in Scotland, are enormously important in helping schools develop their own responses to special needs. However, they do carry with them an inevitable danger that such articulations will be seen to be set in tablets of stone, requiring no interpretation in the light of schools' particular situations and permitting no development in the light of changing circumstances and growing experience.

We would suggest that this research indicates the robustness of the whole school approach, particularly as it has been interpreted in Scotland, in that it is proving capable of enabling schools to respond to the distinctive needs of pupils with specific learning difficulties. However, we would also suggest that those responses should make us cautious of assuming that the whole school approach is a single and static blueprint for provision which all schools should follow slavishly regardless of circumstances. Rather, it might be more appropriate to think in terms of 'whole school approach*es*' — that is, a series of responses, all based on the same fundamental principles, but each adapted to meet the needs of particular pupils in particular contexts.

As one respondent suggested (chapter 4 above), anyone who has spent a career in mainstream special needs work will have a seen a whole series of orthodoxies come and go — and come again. The only way to avoid such cyclical change may be to

eschew the notion of a single orthodox approach in the first place, and to seek a more flexible response to particular individuals and particular contexts. In this respect, the growing salience of specific learning difficulties as an issue may — despite the undoubted challenges it poses — also offer a significant opportunity for rethinking and refreshing the whole school approach. The requirement that such an approach be capable of responding effectively to the distinctive needs of pupils who do not fit the traditional mould of 'the pupil with learning difficulties' is, after all, both a reasonable and an important one.

Recommendations

It may be useful to conclude this report with some broad recommendations for action. These will, of course, have to be read both in conjunction with the detailed arguments and evidence presented throughout this report, and in the light of the small-scale nature of the research itself.

1. Schools' responses to specific learning difficulties

- Schools might wish to review the responses they currently make to pupils with specific learning difficulties in the light of the details of practice and provision reported here and of the model presented in the final chapter.
- In particular, schools might consider developing a *staged* response to specific learning difficulties, based on a fully-articulated conceptualisation of specific learning difficulties and rationale for provision.
- Schools might wish to continue reviewing the quality of their responses on an on-going basis, and should be prepared to demonstrate to interested stakeholders — in particular, to parents — *what* those responses are, *why* they are formulated in that way, and *how far* they are effective in meeting pupils' needs.

2. Regional policy

- Regional authorities might wish to review their policy on specific learning difficulties in the light of this report, considering in particular the issues of definition and of unit *vs.* 'neighbourhood school' provision.
- Regional authorities might consider the support they will need to offer schools to enable them to develop the sorts of responses outlined here. They might particularly wish to consider what guidance should be given to schools in the light of the model of provision offered here.

3. National policy

- SOED might wish to consider the implications of this report for the sort of guidance that might be issued to schools and Regional authorities.

4. Further research

- Despite the substantial literature on specific learning difficulties and the recent valuable contributions of the team at Stirling University, provision for pupils with specific learning difficulties remains an under-researched area, and further studies should be undertaken to assist schools and Regional authorities in formulating their responses.
- There is a particular need for studies which will extend the scope of the present research in two directions: first, by replicating this study in primary schools, where very different issues of resourcing and organisation are likely to emerge; second, by conducting research based on a national sample representative of all types of schools, rather than of schools nominated for the prominence of their specific learning difficulties work. The former study would allow guidance to be given to primary schools similar to that suggested in this report; the latter would establish a national picture of provision and would, in particular, determine the extent to which schools in nominated samples are typical of all schools.
- There is also a need for evaluative studies which would seek to establish the extent to which schools' approaches are achieving their avowed aims and which might permit some comparison between schools and between forms of provision. The cost-benefit model of evaluation being developed elsewhere (see appendix B) might be particularly useful in this respect.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A **References to materials**

Appendix B **The English data**

Appendix C **The research instruments**

Questionnaire

Case study briefing notes

Interview schedules

Appendix D **Note on methodology**

Appendix E **Supplementary charts and tables**

Breakdown of responses

Proportion of pupils identified as having SpLD

Recorded & non-recorded pupils: SpLDs vs. other SENs

Recorded pupils : SpLDs vs. other SENs

Occurrence of categories

APPENDIX A

REFERENCES TO MATERIALS

Educational Kinesiology (Edu-K)

In use in one case study school on an occasional basis. A therapeutic technique aimed specifically at pupils with specific learning difficulties (dyslexia). Further information available from:–

> A. Cameron Cunningham (Chartered Psychologist)
> Falkirk Counselling & Therapy Centre
> 198 Stirling Road
> LARBERT
> FK5 4SQ
> Tel. 0324 557628

The following is a brief extract from the Centre's publicity material:–

> Educational Kinesiology (Edu-K) ... has been developed in California by Paul and Gail Dennison over a number of years ... Edu-K draws its concepts from the work of Doman and Delicato in the Philadelphia Institute for human potential .... Edu-K also uses concepts from Yoga and Acupuncture theory ... we link it to an information processing model developed by Cameron Cunningham ... to achieve and maintain a healthy learning state, we would go through what is called, 'Edu-K Brain Gym'.

Co-Writer

In use in two case study schools on a trial basis. A word prediction program for use alongside a word processor, described by the manufacturer as 'a productivity tool for those who struggle with writing due to injury, language delay or learning disability'. Reviewed by Sally McKeown in *TES Update* 25 March 1994 (p 16). Product catalogue available from:–

> Don Johnston Special Needs Ltd
> c/o NW SEMERC
> 1 Broadbent Road
> Watersheddings
> OLDHAM
> OL1 4HU
> Tel. 061 628 0919

From the manufacturer's catalogue:–

> Word prediction ... cuts down the number of keystrokes, which reduces both the time it takes for the writer to complete a sentence and the physical demands placed upon the writer.

Reading for Sure

A remedial reading scheme in use in one case study school as part of a Regional trial. Developed by Dr Julia Solomon in Perth, Western Australia, and brought to Scotland by Dr Cyril Hellier, Senior pPsychologist, Tayside Region. Employs a code of diacritics which are overwritten on text. It is hoped that the scheme will be of particular benefit to children with specific learning difficulties. Dr Hellier reported on Reading for Sure in *TESS* 3 September 1993. At the time of the case study visits, evaluation of the scheme was under way. The research team wishes to thank Dr Hellier for providing contextual information about Reading for Sure.

Diagnostic Tests and other materials

The following tests and materials were in use in one or more responding schools.

Geoffrey Thomson Unit (1989) *Primary Maths Bank* London: Macmillan

Miles, T R (1983) *Bangor Dyslexia Test* Cambridge: Learning Development Aids

Neale, M D (1989) *The Neale Analysis of Reading Ability (revised British edition)* Windsor: NFER-Nelson

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APPENDIX B

THE ENGLISH DATA

Chapter 1 gives details of reasons for including a comparative element in this research, and the English data that was drawn upon. The principal findings are summarised below.

The surveys

The following features of schools' responses are particularly interesting for our purposes :

1. The approach to specific learning difficulties provision which has been identified as characteristic of schools in Scotland was also evident in the English sample. This approach is essentially eclectic and pragmatic, based on the notion of providing a 'package' of support for individual pupils, and underpinned by a conceptualisation of specific learning difficulties in terms of specific functional weaknesses in an otherwise able student. The terms in which this approach was described will be familiar from the Scottish sample :

> We aim to allow a student with specific learning difficulties to display their understanding of an area, despite their encumbrance.
>
> In-class support is totally individualised - what a student needs we try to supply.
>
> [We aim] to maximise each child's potential within the mainstream curriculum
>
> [We aim to] raise literacy standards - but also creating the ability to cope in life with the problem if necessary.

What is interesting about this shared approach is that the schools which use it are in many other respects very different from each other. They range from a community college serving a large mixed rural-urban catchment area and with a long-established 25 place boarding unit for pupils with specific learning difficulties through to a comprehensive school in a relatively 'deprived' area of a large conurbation, whose approach to specific learning difficulties has only recently developed. This lends credibility to the contention that the approach we have outlined throughout this report is more than simply an artefact of a limited range of circumstances, and comprises a response to specific learning difficulties characteristic of a wide range of schools.

2. Within that broad common approach, some particular strategies were emerging which might be attributable to the peculiarities of the English context :

- Two schools reported initiatives to offer pupils with specific learning difficulties their own tailor-made Modern Foreign Language course. The issue of making Modern Foreign Languages accessible to pupils with literacy difficulties, in the light of the English National Curriculum, has much exercised teachers in England of late, and these approaches might be worthy of further study.
- Three schools reported very close links with voluntary associations. One in particular described such links as a "partnership", and was happy to use its delegated budget to 'buy in' teaching for pupils with specific learning difficulties from the local Dyslexia Centre.
- In this and other schools, pupils with specific learning difficulties brought with them additional human and financial resources which the schools felt able to deploy flexibly. Some schools valued this ability to manage their resources independently of their LEAs, and saw those resources as enhancing their overall special needs provision.
- In contrast, in one LEA, it was the LEA-maintained peripatetic Learning Support Service which was particularly proactive in supporting schools' development of responses to specific learning difficulties. The service was able to supply expertise, to create flexibility, and to network schools' efforts in a way that the schools themselves might have found difficult.

3. The issue of unit provision arose in one LEA where there was a lengthy history of provision for specific learning difficulties (and, indeed, many other forms of special needs) through units attached to mainstream schools. Interestingly, these units had, over time, developed in very different directions in different schools. In one school, for instance, the unit served pupils from well beyond the usual catchment area of the school, and remained more or less distinct from both the mainstream of the school and the rest of its special needs provision. It had its own head and staff, operating by withdrawal from English and Modern Languages lessons and as a 'drop-in centre', as well as through in-class support.

In another school, the unit staff had some years ago begun a programme of professional development with staff from other schools in the area, with the intention of reducing the intake of 'out-of-catchment' pupils to the unit. This had been paralleled by a programme of professional development with staff in their own school which had, they felt, enabled them to dismantle the unit as a segregated form of provision. Instead, provision for pupils with specific learning difficulties had become

part of the school's overall special needs provision which took the form of a mixed economy of in-class support, withdrawal work and tutorial support.

It was evident from the responses of the two schools (both of which were followed up by telephone interview) that they each claimed distinctive advantages for their own particular approaches. On the one hand, the semi-segregated unit offered a valuable "bolt hole" for pupils and gave them the level of clearly-specified and targeted support necessary for them to be able to function in many aspects of the mainstream curriculum. On the other hand, the more integrated approach claimed a more flexible response to individual (rather than categorical) differences, an emphasis on independence for pupils within the mainstream curriculum, and a marked development in subject staff's awareness of special needs.

In fact, the practice reported by the two schools had as many similarities as differences, for both subscribed to the eclectic-pragmatic model described elsewhere in this report. It would, therefore, be misleading to say that the experience of these schools points unequivocally to the superiority of either unit or non-unit-based provision.

4. However, there may be a third factor which is common both to these two schools and to a number of others responding to the surveys. That factor is the 'critical mass' of pupils with specific learning difficulties within the school. The schools which had well-developed approaches to specific learning difficulties also tended to have significant numbers of pupils with specific learning difficulties. One school, for instance, estimated that it had 51 such pupils out of a total roll of nearly 1200; another had 50 pupils with statements of special need for specific learning difficulty and a further 53 without statements out of a roll of 1550; a third had 26 pupils with statements for specific learning difficulties out of a roll of 515.

The precise significance of this critical mass is difficult to explicate but this may nonetheless be worth attempting. Such pupils bring with them important resources in terms of extra finance or teacher time. The school with 50 pupils with statements for specific learning difficulties, for instance, could call upon 4 full time teachers, 5 part time teachers and 3 classroom assistants to meet their needs. In turn, these resources enable the school to construct a response which is targeted at pupils with specific learning difficulties. The same school, for instance, had been able to designate one of its teachers to take overall responsibility for pupils with specific learning difficulties; that teacher and one other held British Dyslexia Association (or BDA recognised) diplomas and the teacher in charge also held a masters degree in specific learning

difficulties; the school had created three bases where work with specific learning difficulties pupils could take place; a student and staff exchange programme had been established with educational institutions in the United States - and so on.

Other schools' provision was less extensive, but it nonetheless appears that the presence within a school of pupils with specific learning difficulties in some numbers is likely both to raise the profile of those pupils' needs and to enable to school to construct a meaningful targeted response. This is not, of course, to say that schools cannot meet the needs of such pupils effectively where they are present in relatively small numbers; such schools might be unlikely to come to light through the sampling techniques used in this piece of research. Neither is it, necessarily, to advocate the concentration of pupils with specific learning difficulties into particular schools by creating units or other special facilities (see chapter 5 for an alternative conclusion). Nonetheless, the situation in these schools presents a marked contrast to that in some of the smaller schools in both the English and the Scottish samples, which were equally committed to high-quality provision, but nonetheless struggled to construct a meaningful response on behalf of a handful of pupils. It may be that there is indeed a 'critical mass' of pupils which *facilitates* schools' responses, and where such a critical mass is not present, schools need to be particularly careful that provision for pupils with specific learning difficulties is not lost amidst all the competing demands which they face.

5. This notion of a 'critical mass' needs to be set alongside other issues relating to the size of the specific learning difficulties population in schools. First is the question of balance between the numbers of pupils with specific learning difficulties and those with other forms of special need. The schools with relatively large populations did not, on the whole, have correspondingly large populations of pupils with other special needs. The school cited above, for instance, reported only 17 pupils with other forms of special need in addition to its 100+ pupils with specific learning difficulties; another school had 35 students with statements for specific learning difficulty, but only 23 with statements for other special needs; a third had 26 with statements for specific learning difficulty and 24 for other needs. It is evident, therefore, that, in some schools, specific learning difficulties were the dominant form of special educational need.

At the same time, one school with a well-developed response to specific learning difficulties raised the issue of setting appropriate rates and criteria for identification. As the Support Co-ordinator commented, "The more you look, the more you find", and the more you find, the more pressure is placed on the school's resources. Other

schools reported that, as their approaches to specific learning difficulties became established, so they became 'magnet schools' for their area, attracting children who, had they not had specific learning difficulties, might have been expected to attend other schools.

There are a number of complex issues here which this small-scale piece of research can raise but cannot resolve. There appears to be some uncertainty in schools regarding the criteria by which a particular child should be identified as having specific learning difficulties. In many of the schools responding to the project, the rate of identification was high and, in some cases, increasing. In other schools, however, the rate of identification was significantly lower. To some extent, the variation depended on LEA placement policy. It is not impossible, however, that amongst the other determining factors were the expertise and attitudes of key personnel within the school, notably the special needs co-ordinator (or equivalent).

Although the effects of any under-identification on pupils are not difficult to imagine, little is known about the causes or effects of relatively *high* rates of identification and relatively large concentrations of pupils with specific learning difficulties in a particular school. It is interesting to speculate, for instance, whether pupils who might otherwise have been regarded as having general learning difficulties or simply as being low attainers in some curriculum areas are being re-categorised as having specific learning difficulties. If this is the case, then it would be important to know whether such categorisation is to their advantage, and whether it disadvantages other children in the school by diverting resources and attention away from their needs. Finally, it might be important to know what the effects might be on the performance of the school as a whole of a significant growth in its specific learning difficulties population.

It is to be anticipated that the *Code of Practice* (DfE, 1994), with its establishment of criteria for the identification of specific learning difficulties and its guidance on appropriate stages of school-based assessment, will bring greater clarity to this situation. Nonetheless, it is evident that there is a good deal we still have to learn about the implications of specific learning difficulties provision.

The Cost-Benefit Evaluation

Five schools in one English LEA are taking part in an evaluation of their provision for specific learning difficulties by means of a cost-benefit analysis. Such analyses seek

to allow comparison between different forms of provision by identifying and quantifying their associated costs and projected benefits (Levin, 1983). In this case, however, it has been deemed more appropriate to make use of both qualitative and quantitative expression of costs and benefits, provided evidence for each is collected with equal rigour. This makes a straight numerical comparison of forms of provision impossible, but it is a somewhat less technically complex approach and it obviates the need for reducing essentially qualitative items (such as curriculum access or pupil satisfaction) to numerical values.

Although the project will not be completed until Spring 1995, it has already yielded some useful outcomes. The following sets of costs and benefits with their associated evidence sources, for instance, has been agreed by participating schools :

CORE COSTS

Type	Cost	Evidence
Personnel	**Teachers : number** **position** **qualifications** **timetabled hours** **preparation/ admin time** **Classroom assistants :** **timetabled hours**	**Timetable** **Interview/questionnaire**
Facilities	**Rooms : number** **timetabled hours**	**Timetable**
Equipment and materials	**I.T. : type & number** **cost (approx)** **Teaching materials :** **type** **cost**	**Audit**
Other inputs	**Volunteer time**	**Timetable**
Opportunities	**Curriculum access :** **missed lessons** **Pupil perceptions (negative)** **Staff perceptions (negative)** **Parental perceptions (negative)** **Impact on SEN work (negative)**	**Timetable** **Interview/questionnaire** **Interview/audit**

CORE BENEFITS

Client group	Benefit	Evidence
Pupil	**Attainment : target skills** **curriculum** **Functioning in lessons** **Curriculum access** **Social functioning** **Self-perception** **Educational/career destinations**	**Tests/observation** **Interview**
School as a whole	**Staff perception (positive)**	**Interview/questionnaire**
Family and community	**Parental perception (positive)**	**Interview/questionnaire**

Although these core items will doubtless be refined as the project develops, they may already offer schools a framework within which they can begin to evaluate their own provision for specific learning difficulties. They may also offer a way forward for a more formal evaluation at Regional and national level. If, as seems likely, schools identify greater numbers of pupils as having specific learning difficulties and if, as a consequence, increasing levels of resource are directed towards those pupils, it will clearly become important to ensure that the costs of provision are balanced by the benefits that ensue and to promote those forms of provision which yield maximum benefits for acceptable costs.

References

Department for Education (1994) *Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs* (London, DFE).

Levin, H. M. (1983) *Cost-Effectiveness: A Primer* (Beverly Hills, Sage).

SNRG Special Needs Research Group

School of Education, University of Newcastle upon Tyne,
St Thomas' Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 7RU

Provision for Pupils with Specific Learning Difficulties in Secondary Schools

UNIVERSITY OF
NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE

1 ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Name of school

Address

Region (and division if appropriate)

Telephone

Fax

Name of principal/headteacher

Name of person whom the project could contact (if different from the above)

Type of school (e.g. comprehensive)

No. on roll ☐

Is the school: Mixed Boys Girls (Please circle as appropriate)

Age From ☐ To ☐

Please give any other relevant information about the school, e.g. is it the site of a special unit?

2 ABOUT THE PUPILS

Specific learning difficulties are those difficulties which affect particular aspects of the pupil's learning, leaving other aspects of learning largely unaffected. In this way they are different from global learning difficulties (which affect all aspects of learning), and from emotional and behavioural difficulties, physical handicap or sensory impairment.

On the basis of this definition, please indicate:–

a) The number of pupils which your school regards as having specific learning difficulties:

- with record of needs ☐
- without record of needs ☐

b) The number of these pupils who display the following difficulties (some pupils, of course, may have difficulties in more than one area, and should be included in the figure for each area in which they have difficulties):–

- specific difficulties in reading ☐
- specific difficulties in spelling ☐
- specific difficulties in mathematics ☐
- specific difficulties in writing ☐
- other forms of specific difficulty ☐

If other, please specify:–

How did you arrive at these figures? (E.g. estimate, information from class teachers, results of diagnostic tests).

c) Number of pupils with forms of special need other than specific learning difficulties,

- with record of needs ☐
- without record of needs ☐

What are the main sorts of special need that these pupils have? (E.g. general learning difficulties, physical handicap, behavioural difficulties).

3 ABOUT SPECIFIC LEARNING DIFFICULTIES

3.1 Does your school have a formal and written definition of 'specific learning difficulties', 'children with specific learning difficulties', or some equivalent term (such as dyslexia)? If so, please could you tell us what that definition is and where it is to be found (e.g. in the school's learning support policy).

3.2 If you do not have a formal definition of specific learning difficulties, what is your *working* definition, i.e. what do you understand specific learning difficulties to be?

4 ABOUT PROVISION

4.1 Provision for all children with special needs

Please describe briefly the provision your school makes for *all* children with special needs, e.g. number of teachers, use of co-operative teaching, use of extraction.

4.2 Provision for specific learning difficulties

What sorts of provision does your school make for children with specific learning difficulties in the following areas:–

a) What staffing, if any, do you have for children with specific learning difficulties? What do these staff do?

b) How do you identify and assess children with specific learning difficulties?

c) What provision, if any, do you make in ordinary classes?

d) What provision, if any, do you make in withdrawal/extraction situations?

e) What provision, if any, do you make in special groups and classes?

f) What do you do to make the curriculum accessible?

g) What involvement is there from local authority services?

Please add any further information about your school's provision.

4.3 Differences between specific learning difficulties provision and other special needs provision

In what ways, if any, does your provision for other kinds of special need differ from the specific learning difficulties provision you have just described?

4.4 Rationale

Please state briefly the rationale for your provision for pupils with specific learning difficulties, i.e. what you hope to achieve through your provision.

What do you believe are the strengths and weaknesses of your approach?

4.5 Impact of specific learning difficulties on the whole school approach

For how long has your school had provision for specific learning difficulties (as distinct from provision for other forms of special needs)?

What led your school to set up this provision?

What effect has your specific learning difficulties provision had on your provision for other forms of special needs? (E.g. changes in forms of provision, changes in specialist teachers' roles).

What problems and opportunities has your specific learning difficulties provision created?

5 ABOUT PARENTS

In what ways does your school involve itself with the parents of children with specific learning difficulties, as individuals and/or as members of parents' organisations?

How does this differ from your involvement with parents of pupils with other forms of special need?

6 OTHER INFORMATION

Please add any further comments that you think might be useful, and enclose any documentation (school policies, staff handbooks etc.) that you think would be informative.

7 NETWORKING

Are you willing to allow the name of the school to be released to other schools and professionals? (Names of schools will NOT be released without your express permission.)

YES / NO

Signature

Position in school

Please return (using the pre-paid envelope provided) to:-

Alan Dyson
Lecturer in Education
School of Education
University of Newcastle upon Tyne
St Thomas' Street
NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE
NE1 7RU

Thank you for your co-operation.

Provision for Specific Learning Difficulties
Case Study Visits: Briefing Notes

The purpose of my visit is to gain as clear a picture as possible of how the school responds to pupils with specific learning difficulties, and to explore with you some of the issues raised by this response. I am particularly interested in the relationship between specific learning difficulties provision and the whole school approach.

The school has already kindly provided me with a great deal of useful information. What I would now like to do is focus on how the school's approach works with one particular pupil, using this as a jumping off point into wider issues. *I would therefore be grateful if you would select for me one pupil whom you would regard as being not untypical of children with specific learning difficulties in your school.* If possible, this pupil should be in S1.

I would like to have the opportunity to talk to the following teachers about this pupil:

- Principal Teacher Learning Support
- Any other Learning Support teacher working with this pupil
- A member of the Guidance team with knowledge of this pupil
- The pupil's English and Maths teachers
- Any other of the pupil's teachers who is available

I would also like to speak to the school's Headteacher (or relevant member of the Senior Management Team if the Head is not available).

I anticipate that the interview with the PTLS will take about one hour, and with the Head about 30 minutes. All other interviews should take 20-30 minutes.

Please remember that the purpose of focusing on one pupil is simply to clarify my understanding of the school's approach to specific learning difficulties. I do not need to have access to confidential information on the pupil, and any information disclosed will be treated in the utmost confidence.

The arrangements I suggest above represent my ideal. It may well be impracticable for the school to match these precisely, and I would wish to cause as little interference with your work as possible. If necessary, please feel free to substitute alternative arrangements which are more convenient. In particular, please do not feel it is necessary to undertake any special preparations beyond setting up interviews. This is *not* an inspection!

As soon as possible after the visit, I will provide the school with a confidential summary report on the information I was given. I will invite you to comment on the accuracy of this report, and hope that it will prove a useful document in the further development of your work.

Interview Schedule
Principal Teacher Learning Support

I am looking at the provision made for [pupil's name].

What do you regard this pupil's special needs as being?

Would you regard this pupil as having specific learning difficulties?

What does the school do to meet this pupil's needs?

Prompt: What is the contribution of: Learning Support department; subject departments; guidance system; external agencies?

What involvement do you have with the parents?

Does working with [pupil's name] present you with any particular opportunities or problems?

In what ways, if any, does this provision differ from what you do for other children in the same year group with other forms of special need?

In what ways is it typical of what you do for other children with specific learning difficulties?

In what ways, if any, has provision for pupils with specific learning difficulties had an impact on the work of the Learning Support department?

Could I now ask you to elaborate on some of responses you gave in the questionnaire?

How do you see the relationship between the need to make provision for pupils with specific learning difficulties and the whole school approach?

How do you see the future development of specific learning difficulties provision?

Are there any other issues raised by provision for specific learning difficulties that I ought to be aware of?

Interview Schedule
Learning Support Teachers

I am looking at the provision made for [pupil's name].

What do you regard this pupil's special needs as being?

Would you regard this pupil as having specific learning difficulties?

What sorts of things do you do to meet this pupils' special needs?

In what ways, if any, are these different from what you do for pupils in his/her class with other sorts of special needs?

Does working with this pupil present you with any particular problems or opportunities?

Thinking about other pupils with specific learning difficulties whom you teach, is what you do for this pupil typical of what you do for the others?

Prompt: are there things you do for other pupils (especially in other year groups) with specific learning difficulties which you have not mentioned in respect of [pupil's name]?

Has working with pupils with specific leaning difficulties affected your role?

Prompt: for instance has it affected your relationships with colleagues?

Interview Schedule
Subject Teachers

I am looking at the provision made for [pupil's name].

What do you regard this pupil's special needs as being?

Would you regard this pupil as having specific learning difficulties?

What sorts of things do you do to meet this pupils' special needs?

In what ways, if any, are these different from what you do for pupils in his/her class with other sorts of special needs?

Does working with this pupil present you with any particular problems or opportunities?

Thinking about other pupils with specific learning difficulties whom you teach, is what you do for this pupil typical of what you do for the others?

Prompt: are there things you do for other pupils (especially in other year groups) with specific learning difficulties which you have not mentioned in respect of [pupil's name]?

Interview Schedule
Headteacher

How would you characterise your school's approach to providing for pupils with specific learning difficulties in terms of fundamental values and purposes?

What do you see as the contribution of different areas of the school to this approach?

Prompt: What is the contribution of: Learning Support department; subject departments; guidance system?

Could you tell me how specific learning difficulties provision has developed in this school?

What impact has the provision had on the school as a whole?

Prompts: role of the Learning Support department; relationship with parents; relationship with local authority.

How do you see the relationship between provision for specific learning difficulties and the whole school approach?

How is the school's approach to specific learning difficulties resourced?

What problems and opportunities has specific learning difficulties provision opened up for the school?

How do you see the future development of specific learning difficulties provision?

Are there any other issues raised by provision for specific learning difficulties that I ought to be aware of?

Interview Schedule
Guidance Teacher

I am looking at the provision made for [pupil's name].

What do you regard this pupil's special needs as being?

Would you regard this pupil as having specific learning difficulties?

What sorts of things do you do to meet this pupils' special needs?

In what ways, if any, are these different from what you do for pupils in his/her class/year with other sorts of special needs?

Does working with this pupil present you with any particular problems or opportunities?

Thinking about other pupils with specific learning difficulties whom you teach, is what you do for this pupil typical of what you do for the others?

Prompt: are there things you do for other pupils (especially in other year groups) with specific learning difficulties which you have not mentioned in respect of [pupil's name]?

APPENDIX D

A NOTE ON METHODOLOGY

Some indication of the methodology employed by this research is provided in chapter 1. This supplementary information may prove of interest to some readers.

The sample

The research used a 'purposeful' (Patton, 1987) rather than a representative sample, constructed through nominations from 'key informants' (ibid.). That is, schools were included in the sample because, in the view of Regional officers who could be supposed to be knowledgeable about their schools, there was *prima facie* evidence that they displayed features which the research wished to investigate. They were not, in other words, included because they were thought to be representative in some way of schools as a whole.

The questionnaire

The questionnaire went through two pilot stages before being used in the main research. The first version of the questionnaire comprised a small number of relatively open-ended questions. This had the advantage of being quick and easy for schools to complete, but yielded responses that tended both to be cryptic and to vary in focus from school to school, making comparisons difficult. The second version, therefore, provided respondents with a greater number of more structured questions. This elicited more elaborated and comparable responses, but inevitably made the questionnaire more time-consuming to complete. It may, therefore, have had the effect of dissuading some schools from responding.

Questions were structured around five main themes :

- contextual information about the school and its pupils
- provision for specific learning difficulties
- conceptualisation of specific learning difficulties
- rationale for provision
- interrelationship between provision for specific learning difficulties and other aspects of the school's provision for pupils with special educational needs (subdivided into similarities and differences, opportunities and threats and parental relations)

The case studies

The sub-sample of schools chosen for more detailed case study was a further purposeful sample drawn from responding schools. Case study schools were chosen because their responses indicated that they had features of particular interest to the research - notably a fully-elaborated approach to provision for specific learning difficulties. Care was taken that the sample should cover a range of school types, contexts and approaches. Relevant documentary evidence (e.g. policy documents) were collected from each school. Interview questions followed the broad framework of the questionnaire, but with a focus on a particular pupil (see chapter 1) and with opportunity to explore issues arising either from the original questionnaire response or during the course of the case study.

Analysis

Standard procedures for content analysis were applied to individual schools' responses to the questionnaire, to interview responses and to school documents. As a first step, responses to each question were categorised in terms of the broad themes referred to above; questionnaire responses were then further analysed in terms of emergent sub-categories (see appendix E).

The allocation of responses to questionnaire items made it possible to undertake simple quantitative analysis of frequency of response within each category. It also made it possible to apply correlation tests (using SPSS) in order to determine whether significant associations existed between particular forms of provision and particular types of rationale reported by schools. Such associations might have indicated that schools were developing distinctive approaches to specific learning difficulties; their absence was taken as confirmation of the hypothesis that any detail differences from school to school were founded upon a broadly consensual approach.

The interview data were handled somewhat differently. Responses from each school were 'displayed' (Miles & Huberman, 1984) using a matrix with the broad categories along one axis and the names of the interviewees along the other. This allowed the data to be scanned in terms of both individual interviewee and category across interviewees. An anonymised version of the analysis matrix was returned to each school for respondent validation, and a corrected version of the matrix produced where necessary. The researchers then independently derived school-level inductive themes from scanning the final matrices and categories emerging from documentary analysis. These were compared with each other to generate agreed school themes. These in turn were compared across schools.

On the basis of these analyses, an interim report was prepared which was returned to schools, regional officers, SOED officials and researchers at the University of Stirling for validation and comment. Regional officers in particular were asked to comment on whether they were aware of approaches to specific learning difficulties other than that outlined in the report. The resultant comments then informed the final report.

Interpretation

The model presented in the final chapter of this report is an *interpretation* of what respondents said and what they and their schools did; it is not simply a reporting of a model which they themselves were able fully to articulate. However, that model is 'grounded' (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) in that it is inductively derived from a systematic analysis of the data.

References

Glaser, B., & Strauss, A. (1967) *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (Chicago, Aldine).

Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1984) *Qualitative Data Analysis: a Sourcebook of New Methods* (Beverly Hills, Sage).

Patton, M. Q. (1987) *How to Use Qualitative Methods in Evaluation* (Newbury Park, Sage).

Breakdown of responses

Response to survey

5 regions participated.

41 schools were nominated.

27 schools responded.

The overall response rate was 66%.

Region	*No. nominated*	*No. responses*	*Response rate (%)*
Borders	3	3	100
Dumfries and Galloway	7	4	57
Fife	5	5	100
Highland	11	7	64
Tayside	15	8	53
TOTAL	**41**	**27**	**66**

All responding schools were mixed comprehensives; 25 were 11/12 - 17/18; 1 was 12 - 16; 1 was 5 - 18.

Unit information

8 schools were the site of special units, but none were units for pupils with specific learning difficulties. In addition, 2 schools reported the use of special classes; 1 was the site of a Learning Centre.

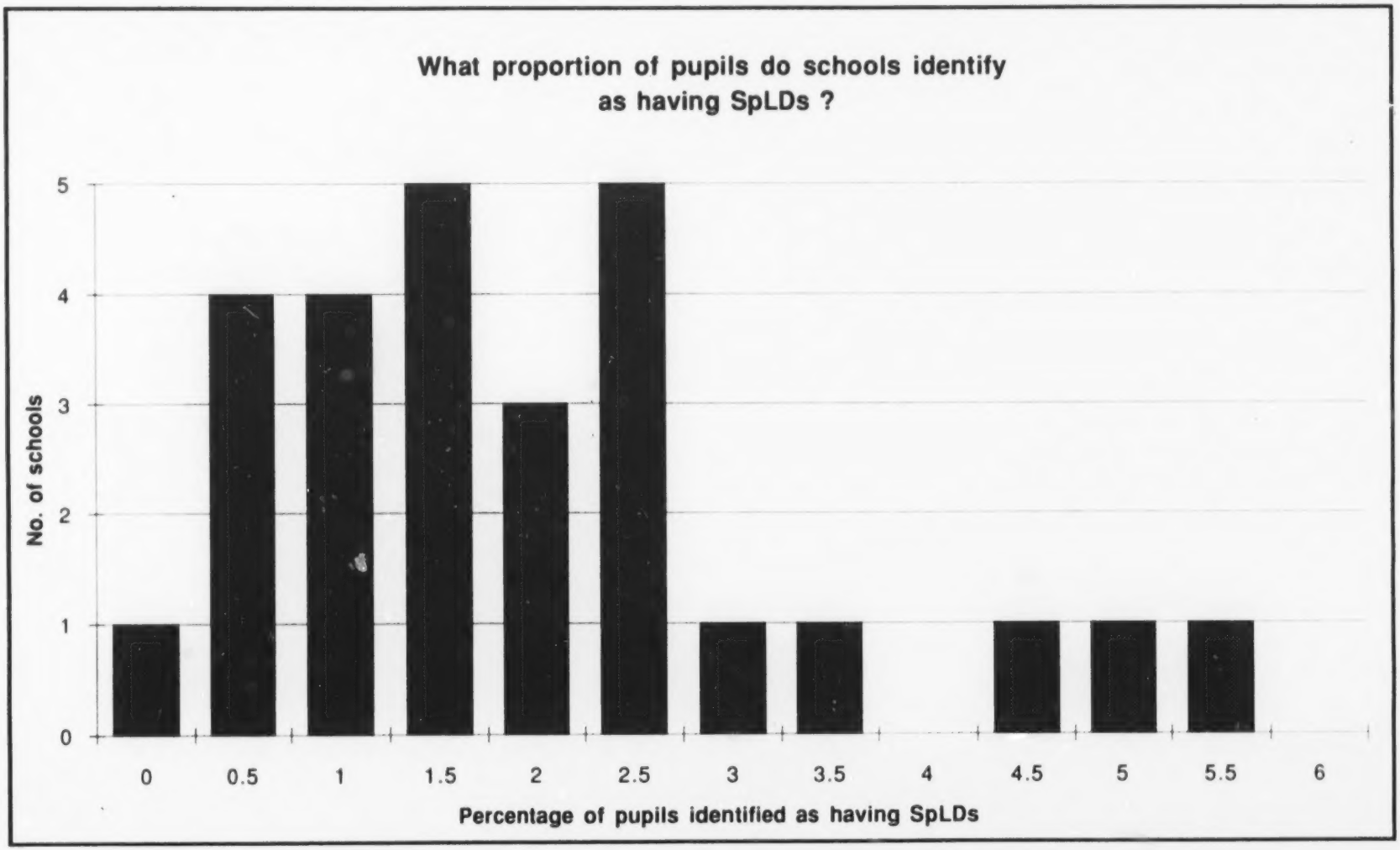
What proportion of pupils do schools identify as having SpLDs ?
No. of schools
0
1
2
3
4
5
0
0.5
1
1.5
2
2.5
3
3.5
4
4.5
5
5.5
6
Percentage of pupils identified as having SpLDs

Chart 1

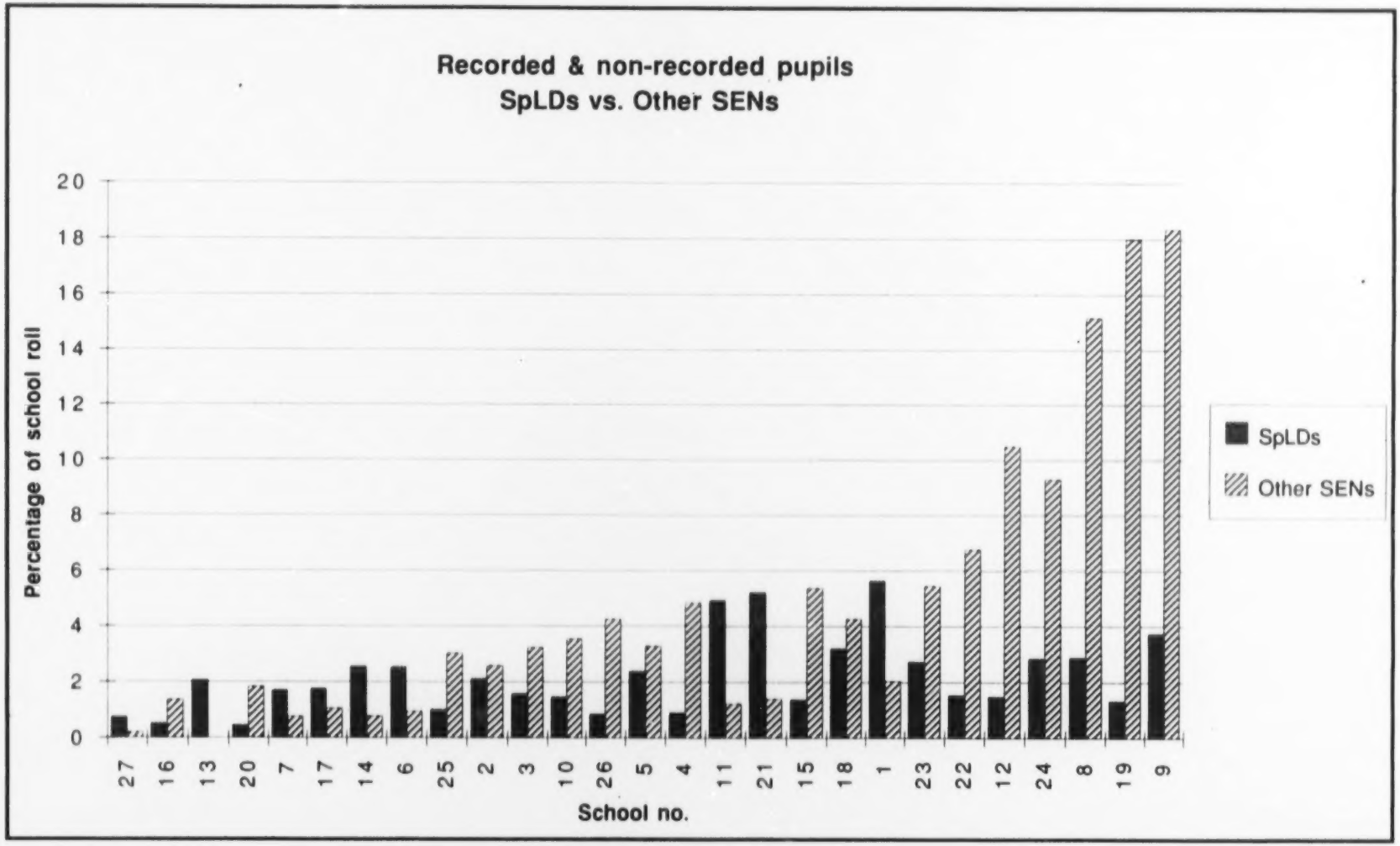
Recorded & non-recorded pupils
SpLDs vs. Other SENs
Percentage of school roll
0
2
4
6
8
10
12
14
16
18
20
27 16 13 20 7 17 14 6 25 2 3 10 26 5 4 11 21 15 18 1 23 22 12 24 8 19 9
School no.
SpLDs
Other SENs

Chart 2

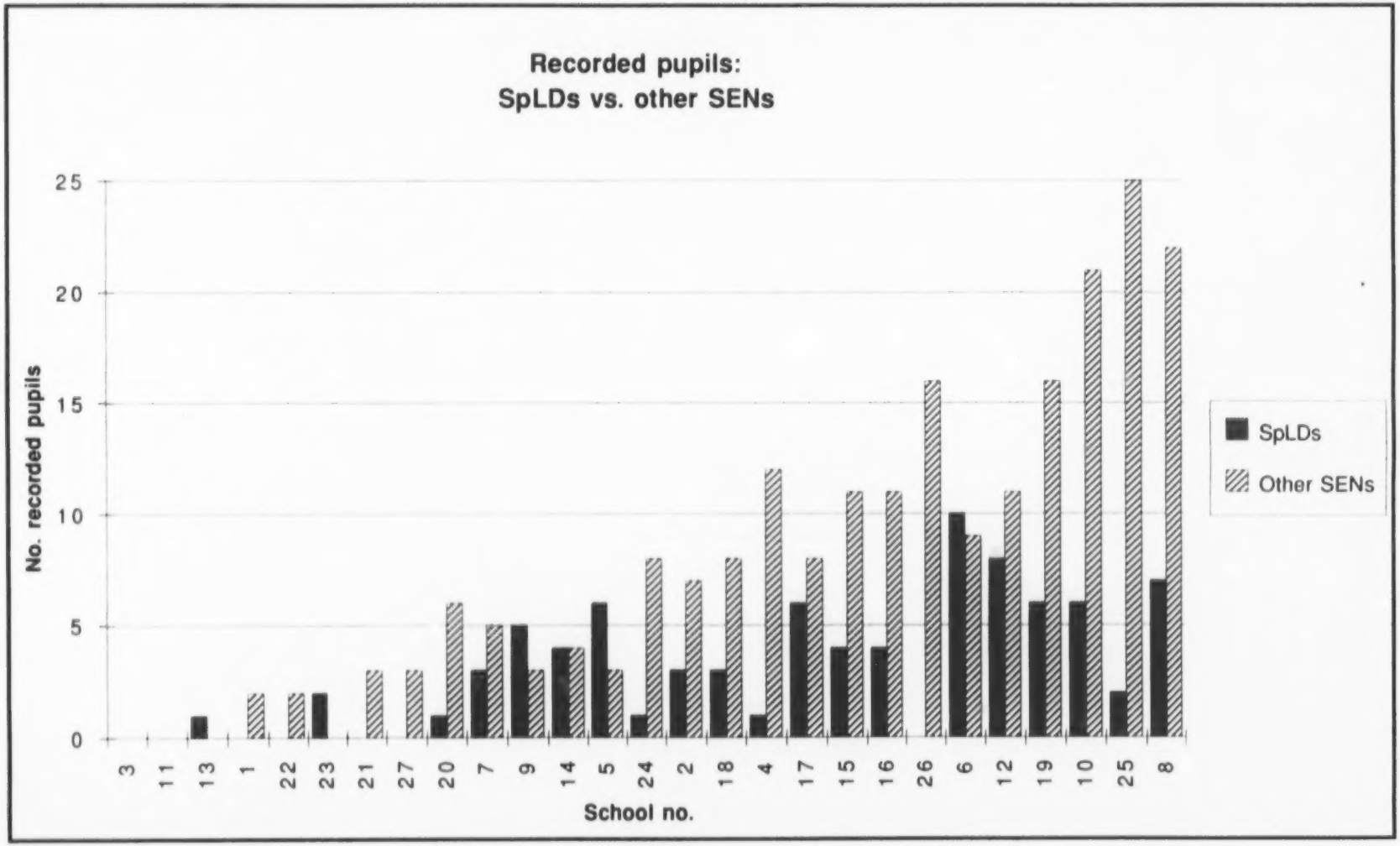
Recorded pupils:
SpLDs vs. other SENs
No. recorded pupils
0
5
10
15
20
25
3
11
13
1
22
23
21
27
20
7
9
14
5
24
2
18
4
17
15
16
26
6
12
19
10
25
8
School no.
SpLDs
Other SENs

Chart 3

Occurrence of categories

Category	No. occurrences
Approach, balance of methods	2
Approach, multi-sensory	1
Approach, quasi-medical	5
Approach, whole school	1
Definition, Regional guidance	1
Definition, SpLD as a term of convenience	2
External, agencies	2
External, agencies NOT involved (positively stated)	1
External, Educational Psychologist	17
External, involvement of medical services	4
External, LEA influence	2
External, links with dyslexia ssociation	2
External, links with local industry	1
External, proactive resource seeking	1
Identification, by observation/support	20
Identification, by Primary liaison	23
Identification, consultation with Guidance staff	1
Identification, diagnostic testing (general SEN)	20
Identification, diagnostic testing (SpLD-specific)	5
Identification, in S1/S2	3
Identification, parental referral	10
Identification, psychological assessment	17
Identification, subject teacher referral	19
Impact, none (positively stated)	8
Opportunity, developing role of LS	17
Opportunity, generalisable strategies	15
Opportunity, increased accountability	1
Opportunity, raised staff awareness	13
Opportunity, relationships between LS & subject staff	3
Opportunity, relationships with pupils	11
Opportunity, respsonse to pupil need	13
Opportunity, SMT support	7
Opportunity, staff development by LS	5
Opportunity, staff development for LS	13
Parents, contribution to learning	8
Parents, individual/normal contact with	23
Parents, role of association	1
Parents, support for	1
Provision, basic skills work	13
Provision, co-operative teaching (in-class support)	27
Provision, consultancy	14
Provision, consultation time	13
Provision, counselling	1
Provision, differentiation by LS Dept	26

Occurrence of categories

Category	No. occurrences
Provision, direct tuition (withdrawal/extraction)	23
Provision, exam dispensations	13
Provision, extra-timetable	5
Provision, flexible deployment of staffing	14
Provision, Information Technology	24
Provision, LEA involvement	15
Provision, Learning Centre	2
Provision, Learning Support staffing	27
Provision, modular courses	1
Provision, negotiation with pupils	1
Provision, outdoor activities	1
Provision, paired reading	8
Provision, peer support	4
Provision, precision teaching	1
Provision, pupils as volunteers	1
Provision, reduced exam options	7
Provision, responsive to pupils' needs	1
Provision, scribing	15
Provision, sheltered	2
Provision, small group	9
Provision, special class	1
Provision, special unit	1
Provision, spelling dictionaries	1
Provision, SpLD specialist staff	3
Provision, staffing for home working	2
Provision, taping of material	20
Provision, transcription service	5
Rationale, access to curriculum	16
Rationale, circumvent barriers to learning /provide coping strategies	9
Rationale, continuum of needs	4
Rationale, emphasis on affective development	2
Rationale, high expectations	1
Rationale, improve communication skills	1
Rationale, individual needs	18
Rationale, integration	15
Rationale, LS as link between parents & other agencies	1
Rationale, motivate pupils	1
Rationale, pupil autonomy	9
Rationale, realisation of potential	15
Rationale, self-esteem (against labelling)	18
Rationale, social development	6
Systems, backup support	1
Systems, departmental checklist	4
Systems, information dissemination	7

Occurrence of categories

Category	No. occurrences
Systems, involvement of Guidance (Pastoral)	3
Systems, negotiation & collaboration with subject departments/class teachers	9
Systems, resourcing provided by LS Dept	3
Systems, school audit	1
Threat, dyslexia seen as the solution	1
Threat, lack of human resources	18
Threat, lack of training	5
Threat, need for prioritisation	2
Threat, no extraction area	1
Threat, parental pressure	5
Threat, perceived discrimination FOR SpLD pupils	3
Threat, relations between LS & subject staff	6
Threat, reliance on specialist expertise	2
Threat, reporting (additional burden)	1
Threat, rising demand for support	7
Threat, tension between protection & integration	1
TOTAL	796